THE IDEAL OF THE FERVENT SOUL

AUGUSTE SAUDREAU

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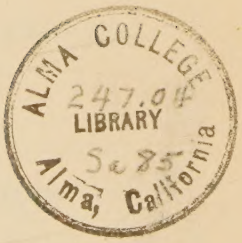
THE IDEAL OF THE FERVENT SOUL

Translated from the French of AUGUSTE SAUDREAU, Honorary Canon of Angers, Chaplain of the Mother House of the Good Shepherd, by FRANCES M. BIDWELL



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PREFACE TO FIRST EDITION

If we make a thorough study of the spiritual writers, we shall perceive a notable difference between the teaching of the old masters and the greater number of the modern. Both hold that perfection cannot be obtained except by great effort and with the assistance of grace. This is the Catholic doctrine, admitted by all. But the modern writers lay more stress on the part played by the will in acquiring perfection; their chief aim is to show what struggles the soul must make to eradicate her faults, and the virtues she ought to practise; and they do not sufficiently emphasize the powerful help granted to truly faithful souls, nor the precious fruits they will reap. The ancient authors, on the other hand, point out plainly the part played by grace, the wonderful effects it produces in generous souls, the light it gives, the detachment it procures, and the sweet, familiar, and loving intercourse with God it renders possible. They paint in glowing colours the happiness of the perfect life.

Clement of Alexandria, who claims to derive his doctrine from the disciples of the Apostles, speaks at some length of the gnostic, the man versed in supernatural knowledge and enlightened by God; he sets forth his complete detachment, his entire abandonment, the profound peace he enjoys, his great virtues and his perfect likeness to God.

Dionysius, the mystic, whose teaching has always been approved by saints and doctors, lays stress on the three grades of the spiritual life, purgation, illumination, and union; he returns constantly to the theme of the mysterious but sublime revelation made by God to faithful souls, and the loving union he establishes between himself and them. Saints Maximus, Thalassius, and Hesychius also speak enthusiastically of the ineffable

union of the soul with God, and of the fruits of virtue which it produces.

Cassian, under the influence of the semi-Pelagian error, tends to exaggerate the part played by the will, and to depreciate that of grace, but after having affirmed the close connection between perfection of prayer and perfection of virtue, he sketches a beautiful picture of the perfect prayer, in which the soul is plunged in contemplation of the Divinity, and is intimately united with God. Such a prayer is nothing more than the exercise of pure love, and he declares that this should be the goal sought by the servant of God (*Conf.*, ix and x).

St Gregory also extols the benefits of the perfect life, in which the soul conceives more than she can express, visualizes more than she can comprehend, is favoured with profound peace, freed from earthly desires, and strengthened in the practice of virtue.

In his treatise, *De Conversione ad Cleros*, (ch. xii, xiii, xiv), St Bernard urges the converted sinner, after having bewailed and atoned for his faults, to implore spiritual blessings, the paradise of interior delight, *Paradisum voluptatis internae*. If he search diligently he will find this paradise, this garden-plot decked with the fairest flowers, whose charming freshness we may inhale; " For," says he, " God cannot lie who has said, *Tollite jugum meum . . . et invenietis requiem animabus vestris:* Take my yoke upon you . . . and you shall find rest to your souls." In his beautiful sermons on the Canticle of Canticles he speaks in touching terms of the divine kiss; he delights in describing the favours contained in this kiss, the visits of the divine Spouse to the soul, the intimacy of his union with her, the graces he gives her, and the virtues with which he enriches her. Richard of St Victor, a spiritual writer who enjoyed great prestige in the Middle Ages, and was the author of the *Scala Claustralium*, so much appreciated by Suarez; Blessed Albert the Great, in his works, *Paradisus Animae*, and *De Adhaerendo Deo;* St Bonaventure, and many others, all delight in painting the joys of the interior and perfect life.

Among the great mystics of the fourteenth century,

Ruysbroeck, Tauler, and Suso, we find the same encouraging spirit. They all love to comment on the words of the Holy Spirit, *Gustate et videte quoniam suavis est Dominus:* O taste and see that the Lord is sweet. *Mihi adhaerere Deum bonum est:* It is good for me to adhere to God. Tauler in particular constantly repeats this great truth: "Give yourselves wholly to God and he will give himself wholly to you; renounce your will for his, and he will do so for yours; in everything abandon yourselves to God, and he will provide for all your needs and fulfil all your spiritual desires with a generosity and munificence beyond all human conception."

The author of the *Imitation* delights in reiterating that the soul which endeavours to live the interior life and gives itself entirely to God, is requited even here below for its sacrifices. *Frequens illi visitatio cum homine interno dulcis sermocinatio, grata consolatio, multa pax, familiaritas stupenda nimis:* "Many a visit does God make to the interior man, sweet is his communication with him, delightful his consolation, great his peace, and his familiarity exceedingly amazing" (bk. ii, ch. i).

In 1548, St Ignatius, writing to St Francis Borgia, urged him to beg the divine Master for "his most holy gifts; the gift of tears . . . of joy, of spiritual repose, of intimate consolation, and for all the spiritual sentiments peculiar to these gifts, such as humility . . . for without these gifts all our thoughts, words, and works are imperfect, cold and confused." St Ignatius believed that these gifts would surely be granted to his disciples, for in his constitutions he says: "As for the religious who have received their complete training, they will assuredly be spiritual men; they will no longer walk, but run in the way of God; there is no need, therefore, to prescribe anything in the way of prayers, meditations, and penances for them; one single rule suffices—love and discretion under the sanction of superiors." "St Ignatius expected," concludes Père Brou, "that his children would go forth from the period of formation so perfect in the ways of mental prayer that they would

need no further direction than that of the Holy Spirit, controlled by obedience" (*Spirituality of St Ignatius*, ii, p. 23).

St Teresa, in all her works, directs the attention to what the author of the *Imitation* calls "the marvellous effects of divine love." Speaking of those who give themselves to God without reserve, she says: "These are his beloved children, whom he desires to keep always at his side, with whom he is ever present because they desire to be ever present with him. He makes them sit at his table, he nourishes them with his own food" (*Way of Perfection*, ch. xvi).

The writings of St John of the Cross are alive with descriptions of the unitive way and its precious graces of infused faith and love. He reveals to us both the means of attaining to and of progressing in it; and his pictures of this way of love excite in all who read an ardent desire to follow therein.

St Francis de Sales wrote his book *On the Love of God* for souls well advanced in devotion. It is a complete treatise on the life of love or the unitive way. In it the saintly doctor describes the sentiments, the interior dispositions, the ways of prayer, and the admirable virtues of those who have attained to perfect love.

In the short, but very complete, work in which the disciples of Father Lallemant have condensed his doctrine, everything refers to perfection. We read therein of its excellence, its tremendous advantages, the obstacles in the way of its acquisition and the surest means of obtaining it, and also of the fruits of the Holy Spirit and the virtues which God gives to truly interior souls.

Father Surin, disciple of Father Lallemant, continually recalls the spiritual riches and great blessings which are bestowed on the perfect.

The *Dialogue* of St Catherine of Siena, a collection of the revelations given to the holy Dominican by the Eternal Father, and disclosed by her during her ecstasies, contains long and beautiful descriptions of the unitive state, of the lights given to souls united to God, of their works and their great virtues, and of the

wonderful prerogative of perfect love. In the collection of the revelations made to St Mary Magdalen of Pazzi are also found beautiful pages on the disposition of perfect souls.[1]

Why do all these great masters thus study to charm their pupils with pictures of the favours which the Lord accords to those who are united to him by true love? It is in order to excite their zeal and render them valiant, energetic, and constant in the struggle necessary for acquiring perfection.

When the Hebrews drew near the Promised Land, the Lord directed that twelve explorers be sent into the country they had come to conquer. He evidently intended that the description they would give on their return, of this wonderful land overflowing with milk and honey, should arouse the ardour of the Israelites and heighten their courage.

For the same reason do the great masters portray the perfect life in glowing colours. St Teresa states this emphatically: "To what end, think you, my daughters, have I made known to you the great reward before speaking of the struggle, in thus disclosing to you the sweetness of the celestial fountain from which the soul will quench its thirst in living waters? It is that you may not be disheartened by the labours and contradictions that you will meet with on the way, but may advance with courage, yielding to no fatigue; that you may not abandon the enterprise when on the point of arriving at the fountain, and lose these benefits through despair of attaining them." And again: "Complete renunciation is so hard for our poor human nature that it needs encouragement; the thought of the blessings thus procured will cheer the soul as nothing else can do. It is carrying austerity too far to say that we ought to

[1] In *Etudes* of May 5, 1913, Father de Grandmaison, S.J., makes a very true remark, which confirms what we have just said: "All spiritual writers have extolled the first stage of the mystical way, and have led their disciples along this route. In this respect there is no difference in the schools, no diverging counsel. The most convinced supporters of meditation, the most determined intellectualists, including St Thomas Aquinas and St Ignatius, differ in nothing from St Francis of Assisi or the author of the *Imitation*."

deny ourselves all human satisfaction, if we do not at the same time speak of the sweetness and delight which will follow this renouncement, and the pleasure it will bring us even in this life" (*Way of Perfection*, ch. xii).

Modern authors rarely describe these precious fruits of perfect love. They give excellent counsels, but they do not hold out comforting hope to the souls they would reach, nor cause the splendour of the Promised Land to glitter before their eyes; they forget to extol its beautiful scenery, its mild climate and delicious fruits. They outline the rules of the purgative and illuminative ways most admirably, and show how to make progress in these ways; but they do not say enough of the unitive way, nor by disclosing its charms inspire the soul with an ardent desire for it. To use a comparison taken from St John of the Cross (*Ascent of Mt. Carmel*): "They teach how to mount the stairs that lead to the royal apartments, but they do not speak of the favours that the king bestows on those whom he admits to his intimacy nor of what will be theirs once they have entered the chamber of their beloved sovereign." It is better, they say, to be reticent on this subject, for illusions are much to be feared; apply yourselves wholly to the ascent of the stairs: and they repeat this advice even to those who have climbed the steps and are already in the presence of the king.

Whence comes this striking difference? It seems to us that the failure of modern authors in describing the unitive state, as did the great masters, is due to their non-comprehension of it. We have related elsewhere (*Life of Union with God*, 3rd ed.) how in the sixteenth century even theologians of renown, following in the steps of the celebrated Melchior Cano, showed lamentable prejudice against spirituality generally, and particularly against the mystic, whom they fought with a zeal more ardent than wise. Misled by excessive fear of Illuminism and Quietism they regarded the teachings of even the best spiritual authors with suspicion; and from this epoch dates a sad opposition to the true principles of mysticism, and an alteration of the traditional doctrine. This movement became more accentu-

ated towards the end of the seventeenth century and during the whole of the eighteenth. Since then most authors seem to have lost the true idea of the unitive way and the perception of the essential part played therein by the Holy Ghost. The ancient authors attributed the progress of faithful souls to the mystical graces of light and love; the former contributing the gifts of understanding, knowledge, and wisdom, which enlighten the soul and perfect its faith; and love, pure and intense, fortifying the faithful soul and uniting it closely to God. The modern authors, in their desire to check the excessive enthusiasm of certain souls for mystical favours, disparaged their importance. They mistakenly represented them as graces *gratis datae*. Now the graces *gratis datae*, though they may be used for the benefit of our neighbour, are no guarantee of the perfection of the recipient; they may be encouragements, but never a means; they are merely accessories, and even superfluous ones. "By our efforts and by our fidelity, aided by grace, we can attain to the same heights of sanctity to which the mystics are borne by God." These remarks of an anonymous theologian who annotated the works of Sister Marie Aimée de Jésus give a résumé of the teaching of the greater number of modern authors. They insist that there are two very distinct unitive ways, one which they call extraordinary, wherein the soul is favoured with mystical graces, to which they wish no one to aspire; the other, the ordinary unitive way, which the soul can reach by its own strength, aided by the ordinary graces which enable us to practise the ordinary Christian virtues, those common alike to beginners and to the perfect. Leaving what they call the extraordinary way to the authors who make special treatises on exceptional favours such as visions, revelations, and the like, they, in their sermons and spiritual books, speak only of the ordinary unitive way. They depict it as the state in which the soul submits its will entirely to God's will, and in this they are correct. But they never go further or add to what they have said when treating of the illuminative way, for, according to them, the unitive way is only distinguishable from the

illuminative way by a greater strength and a firmer constancy in the practice of virtue.

This change in the teaching of spirituality is most regrettable, and it appears to us to be desirable to return to the ancient doctrine. We cannot do better than imitate the great masters, for the more clearly the beauty and advantages of perfection are perceived, the more it will be desired and sought after, and the greater will be the number of those who attain to it.

The object of the present work is to encourage souls to aspire to the unitive life, to show them that God desires to be united to them, that he waits to bestow special privileges upon them, and graces which will exalt them to perfect virtue, and enable them to walk in the unitive way. The hour seems to have come when, according to the plans of Providence, the reign of the Heart of Jesus shall be established in the world. In inspiring the holy Pontiff Pius X to promulgate the memorable decree on frequent communion, Jesus shows that he desires to give himself lavishly to his children. Great fruit has already been produced thereby, and we may hope for still greater. But in order that the reign of Christ may be extended, it is necessary that the number of his true friends, those called to be his chief instruments of grace and most powerful auxiliaries, be multiplied in the Church. Through them many will receive the light of faith, many sinners will be converted and saved, the faithful will be encouraged to acquire relief, joy will abound in heaven, and God will be glorified in his children.

PREFACE TO SECOND EDITION

The return movement to traditional spirituality, though everywhere on the increase, still meets with a certain amount of opposition. We therefore deem it expedient to make here some observations which have been already published (*L'Ami du Clergé*, March 8, 1923), and excellent judges tell us they are useful in elucidating disputed questions.

If a marvellous unity of doctrine, which reveals the finger of God, has existed in the Church throughout all ages, there have also taken place in the course of time important changes which it is necessary to take into account in order to avoid error. Succeeding generations, while all admitting the same fundamental truths, do not always observe with the same clearness certain other truths not so strictly imposed by the Church on her faithful; these truths were less studied at certain epochs, and at times were even half-concealed by widespread prejudice and inaccurate doctrines. Have we not seen the philosophical doctrines of great theologians —so necessary for an exact and thorough knowledge of dogma—for centuries ignored and replaced by Cartesian and ontological philosophy? Have we not seen the doctrine of the Pope's infallibility, which was undisputed in the Middle Ages, again contested in our day by Gallican doctors? Have we not noticed at the same time over-severe morality replace the more equitable morals of the Middle Ages, and the errors of Liberalism mislead a considerable number of Catholics?

Latterly, however, these errors have been dispelled. The light of truth has again burst forth, and the Church has greatly benefited by a return to traditional doctrines.

The proclamation of the dogma of Infallibility, dreaded by over-timid Christians as inopportune, has but tightened the bonds which unite the faithful to their

common Father, and has even, as in France at the time of the Separation, served to unite and strengthen them against their enemies. Never before, perhaps, in like circumstances, has such perfect unanimity been shown as then; it astonished and disconcerted the persecutors. The return to Christian philosophy has strengthened many irresolute minds; it has facilitated the study of the great theologians, and has brought about a brilliant revival of sacred learning. Exegesis, restored to honour, clarifies and expounds the Holy Scriptures. History, studied at its source, reveals both the hand of God and the part played by human wickedness in this world. The study of social laws, under the guidance of the luminous teachings of Leo XIII, has enlightened us as to the relations which should exist between the State and its subjects, employers and employees. A loving study of the liturgy enables both priest and people to fulfil more perfectly the all-important duty of prayer. The acts of the holy Pope Pius X, which introduced an entirely new legislation and urged all the faithful, even young children, to seek more frequent union with the Author of all graces, presage a glorious future for the Church.

Even the study of mysticism seems to have come again into favour. But for the many who are interested in it, there are others who watch its revival with a sceptical or an anxious eye. They say: "To what purpose is so much discussion concerning that which is a complete mystery, the comprehension of which is confined to a very small number of privileged souls? It is not practicable for the ordinary run of mankind, and one can easily attain to perfection without it."

These objections are without foundation, and to them we reply: "A true knowledge of the mystic state and of mystical graces is not difficult of attainment. God makes use of these graces to lead souls to perfection. It is therefore very important that we should know how to dispose ourselves to receive them, and how to employ them when received, for the number of souls to whom they are given is far greater than is imagined."

Mystical doctrine has been beautifully expounded by

holy doctors whose works are highly approved by the Church. Such are the Greek and Latin Fathers, Clement of Alexandria, Dionysius the mystic, St Maximus, Cassian, St Gregory the Great, St Bernard, Richard of St Victor, Blessed Albert the Great, St Thomas, St Bonaventure, Tauler, Blessed Henry Suso, Blessed John Ruysbroeck, St Teresa, St John of the Cross, St Francis de Sales, St Jane de Chantal, Father Lallemant, Venerable Father Libermann, etc. It would be an insult to such holy authors to say that their descriptions of the mystical state were unintelligible. On reading their works attentively we at once perceive that the mystical graces of which they speak are poured directly into the soul, and are not acquired by the help of reason; such are the light of faith and a practical yet most wonderful love. The existence of these graces is now admitted by all, and this is a great delight for the authors who have worked for the recognition of this doctrine of the great masters. Even those who still hesitate to give to these eminent graces the name of "mystical," yet admit that they exist, and that they are due to the exercise of the gifts of the Holy Ghost. They acknowledge that they produce "a contemplation in which the soul is more passive than active," and that they alone are able to promote perfect union with God. Neither do they deny—how could they?—that such graces are indeed granted to truly generous souls, and that they facilitate the practice of perfect virtue. It is, then, of sovereign importance that these precious graces be described to the faithful, both for their encouragement and instruction.

The following allegory will illustrate this:

Two skiffs, impelled by oarsmen, float on the ocean. Each boat is provided with a mast and the sails are stowed away in the bottom of the hold. The master of one of the boats ignores the existence of these sails, and orders the seamen to row with vigour, for winds are never felt in the part of the ocean where they chance to be, and all fancy it will be the same wherever they go. The seamen obey the command without animation. At the slightest feeling of fatigue they relax, and the

skiff makes only slight progress. The master of the other skiff, however, tells his men that their boat possesses an excellent set of sails and that if they have sufficient energy and constancy to reach distant seas they will there find steady winds, which will lighten their labour, and make the voyage quicker and more agreeable; he teaches them, too, how to spread the sails and to direct the skiff. Eager to enjoy these advantages, the men row with vigour and perseverance, and soon reach the region where favourable winds prevail. They unfurl the sails, and arrive shortly in a happy country which the sailors of the other craft will never see.

The friends of mysticism are like the master of the second skiff. Their doctrine, which they have imbibed from the great doctors mentioned above, is far more encouraging than that which prevailed from the seventeenth to the twentieth century. Take for example St Teresa. She insists always on the necessity of faithful prayer—especially mental prayer and the recollection which prolongs it—and on mortification and humility. But to those who persevere she promises mystical graces which will invest them with all these virtues, graces given directly and in a perfect manner by our Lord himself. She bases her promise not only on her own experience and knowledge of souls, but also on the promise of our Lord, who invites all generous hearts to come unto him and drink of these precious graces (John vii, 37, 38). Again she says, "Certain books state that we must be indifferent if evil be attributed to us, and even rejoice more over it than if we were praised, that we should care nothing for honours, be completely detached from earthly affection . . . and many other things of like nature. In my opinion such graces are supernatural, and are pure gifts of God" (*Life*, xxx; *Obras*, vol. i, p. 257). She applies the word supernatural to contemplation. She also declares that even if we feel far removed from such dispositions, instead of being discouraged we must trust in God and devote ourselves to meditation. For by giving ourselves to that, and struggling to be single-hearted, we shall at length obtain the grace of contemplation which will

bring all the other virtues in its wake. "When God gives you to drink of this water," she says, "that is to say, of the grace of contemplation, you will understand that true love of God is master of all else, yea, even of the world itself. In contemplation the Lord draws the soul close to himself, and in a moment teaches it more truths and gives it more light on the nothingness of earthly things than it could otherwise have acquired in many years. Those who love earthly honours or temporal goods will make little progress, even though they practise prayer and meditation for years; only the perfect prayer will rid them of such defects" (*Way*, xii; *Obras*, vol. iii, p. 61). Again she points to the perfect practice of the virtues as being the best proof that a soul is in the contemplative and mystical state. "It is certain," she says, "that as soon as the soul empties itself of all created things and detaches itself from all for the love of God, the Lord fills it with himself, and then takes place the mystical union, the union with the uncreated Spirit, from which the soul receives the most perfect virtues" (*Seventh Mansion*, ii; cf. *Fifth Mansion*, ii).

Such is the beautiful doctrine of St Teresa. We have referred to her because those who would abide by the modern theories which proclaim mystical graces to be additional favours not given in the ordinary way of spiritual life, promised by God to none, and to which none should aspire, make use of the name of this great saint and say they are disciples of St Teresa. But their doctrine is certainly not hers, nor is it that of St John of the Cross. This they grant more willingly, but they say that we gravitate around St Thomas and St John of the Cross. We do more: we reproduce their teaching and repeat their words. In the first book of the *Ascent of Mount Carmel*, St John exhorts the soul which would reach perfection to practise mortification of all natural inclinations. Then, like St Teresa, he affirms that none can attain perfection by their own efforts, even when these be aided by grace and based on faith. But if by a generous renunciation they empty themselves of all that is natural, God will fill them with

the supernatural—that is, with superhuman and mystical graces. "This supernatural," says the saint, "is a new and loving knowledge of God, whereby he unites himself with the soul (*Ascent*, ii, 22). "God never imparts wisdom without love" (*Night*, ii, 12 *et seq.*). "The soul is filled with love without reasoning or action on her part" (*Living Flame*, st. 3, v. 3 and 4). "Without this new birth in the Holy Spirit she cannot enter the kingdom of God, which is the state of perfection" (*Ascent*, ii, 4). Prior to the reception of this new knowledge and infused love the soul is very weak. Many imperfections are mingled with her virtues (*Dark Night*). But when God pours into the soul a new knowledge and a new love of himself, she is so completely endowed with supernatural strength that, instead of acting after a natural manner, she will act divinely (*Ascent*, i, 5). She is transformed into a state of perfection, and as she becomes more and more passive under the action of God, he fills her more abundantly with faith, hope, love, and all the other virtues (*Ascent*, ii, 13). This doctrine is one with that of St Francis de Sales, who sets forth plainly in *The Devout Life* how virtues are practised before mystical graces have been bestowed on the soul. In the *Treatise on the Love of God*, he declares that, "Milk, which is a nourishment and gift of love, represents mystical science and theology—that is, the sweet and amorous enjoyment given supernaturally to the spirit, which is worth incomparably more than the wine we draw from human discourse" (bk. v, ch. xi). In book vi he thus describes mystic love: "This love brings with it the gift of contemplation, which is the end and aim of all religious exercises" (ch. vi). Then the holy doctor discourses on contemplation. He describes infused recollection, quiet, meditation sweet or arid, and the perfect virtues which are inspired by divine love (xi, 14). "Through love the gifts of the Holy Ghost are exercised, and charity will be to us another Jacob's ladder, composed of the seven gifts, as of so many steps, by which men will mount from earth to heaven to become one with the heart of almighty God. At the top of this

ladder God leans towards us; he gives us the kiss of love and that drink from the sacred vessel of charity which is better than wine. Having enjoyed these loving favours, we are filled with zeal to show fraternal charity to our neighbour" (xi, 15). Finally, the holy doctor teaches that charity is joyful, peaceable, patient, kind, long-suffering, gentle, faithful, moderate, temperate, chaste; and that divine love bequeaths joy and interior consolation with great peace of heart, "which renders easy the practice of all virtues" (xi, 19). Such was also the doctrine of that wonderful school of mystics which, in the seventeenth century, was the glory of the Society of Jesus. "The shortest and surest road to perfection," said Father Lallemant, "is purity of heart, for God is ready to grant all graces to those who put no obstacle in the way. If two people were to consecrate themselves at the same time to the service of God, one devoting himself entirely to good works and the other endeavouring to purify his heart and remove from it all obstacles to grace, the latter will reach perfection twice as soon as the former" (*Spiritual Doctrine*, princ. 4, ch. xi). "Those who strive for perfection by means of systematic methods instead of abandoning themselves entirely to the guidance of the Holy Spirit, never attain either to the sweetness or the maturity of virtue; they must continually struggle against difficulties which often overcome them, whilst those who walk under the direction of the Holy Ghost in the way of simple recollection, do good with a fervour and a joy worthy of their guide; they fight with gladness of heart and win glorious victories" (*ibid.*, ch. v). "Without contemplation we shall neither advance far in virtue ourselves nor be capable of helping others in the way. We shall never get rid of our weaknesses and imperfections, but shall remain fettered to the earth, unable to subdue our natural feelings or render perfect service to God. One month of contemplation will lift us nearer to perfection than would ten years without it" (Princ. 7, ch. iv). This doctrine of Father Lallemant, together with that of St Teresa, St John of the Cross, and St Francis de Sales, may be summed up by saying that

perfection can be obtained only through the exercise of the gifts of the Holy Ghost.

Later on there appears a new school with quite different theories. This school was the result of the anti-mystical reaction which began in Spain at the close of the sixteenth century, and prevailed through many succeeding ones. One of the fundamental principles of this new school was that mystical graces should not be promised to faithful souls; they would not even permit the desire for them. This contradicting of the great masters shows a grave misunderstanding of the mystical and contemplative graces; indeed, when speaking of contemplation, this school gives a totally different idea of it.

In order to describe different methods of prayer St Teresa made use of the simile of irrigation. Water drawn laboriously from a well she represents as meditative or non-mystical prayer; the abundance given by the chain pump corresponds to the prayer of contemplation, while showers of rain resemble the prayers in which the soul is passive under the action of God. Rodriguez also describes these two methods: the one of irrigation by manual labour, which he, too, calls meditation; and irrigation by means of rain from the sky, representing contemplation, "In which a man is so transported and absorbed in God, that he forgets both whence he came and whither he goes."

In the eighteenth century, Scaramelli, one of the best qualified representatives of the modern school, gave a long description of meditation in his *Direttorio Ascetico*, but he represents contemplation as a state altogether extraordinary, which it is rash and arrogant to desire. This was the doctrine imparted to all who received their sacerdotal training in the last century, for the trend of thought at that time was distinctly anti-mystical.

The authors of this period speak only of the effort which must be made to acquire virtue. They never tell of the wonderful effects of mystical grace and infused love. According to them, it is only by repeated acts of virtue that the soul can rise to perfection. "He who has acquired the knowledge of any art," says

Rodriguez, "knows how to put this art into practice," and he cites as example the skilful lute-player. "So is it," he adds, "with those who have acquired the habit of virtue; they practise it without difficulty." The reader of his treatise on humility will be quickly convinced of his own nothingness, but Rodriguez never says, as does Saint Teresa: "Courage! God will reward your efforts by himself giving you a humility such as alone you could never attain" (Cf. *Life*, xv).

It is the same with Scaramelli. Speaking of the third degree of patience which consists of enduring tribulations joyfully, he says: "If we practise the first two degrees courageously, and recognize adversity as desirable, we shall then by the grace of God attain to the third degree." St Teresa teaches that such a virtue is supernatural and the gift of God, and experienced directors agree with her. They notice that only the recipients of the precious graces of mystical faith and love, of infused contemplation and constant union with God, ever attain to perfect virtue. This teaching of the holy doctors of mysticism is the correct one, for it gives consolation and encouragement and produces wonderful fruit. It holds up a beautiful ideal to pious souls; it shows them how to prepare for the reception of grace, and how to profit by the gift when received. Up to the close of the nineteenth century the great mystical writers, such as St Teresa and St John of the Cross, were little studied; we were dissuaded from reading them, and were told that the works of these holy authors were only meant for souls favoured with ecstasies or revelations; that for others they were dangerous fare.

This mistrust of the mystical doctors has done great harm, for through it many, who, thanks to the reading of these precious books would have taken their flight towards the perfect life, have remained in lower spheres. The refusal to acknowledge the frequency of the contemplative state described by the great saints—ecstasies and transports excepted—prevents their books from being studied as they should be by those for whom they are most suitable; and many fervent souls are thus

wronged. We must not forget the bitter complaints of St Teresa, St John of the Cross, and St Jane de Chantal against directors, who, ignorant of the rules of the mystic state, turn souls aside from the way to which God calls them, and so do them immeasurable harm. Fortunately there is now a return to the true idea of contemplation and divine union extolled by the saints, and represented by them as the normal culmination of spiritual life. To those who recognize these states and yet hesitate to regard them as the results of mystical graces we would say: "Pray do not indefinitely postpone the return to the doctrine of the great masters. Make known to souls the goodness of God; show by what easy paths he leads the truly generous; do not insist that they row laboriously and advance slowly. What was true in the time of St Teresa is true to-day: 'It is exaggerated severity to teach the renouncement of all human satisfaction, without telling of the sweetness that follows this renunciation, and the advantages that are derived from it even in this life.'" Souls must, indeed, be exhorted to complete renunciation, for without it perfection is impossible. Self-conquest should be our aim in everything; we must concede to nature only what God wills, and indulge in such amusements as travelling, reading, smoking, and all pleasures of the senses only when they are dictated by reasonable motives. For the sake of self-discipline we must practise mortification in all its forms. This is the teaching of the great mystics of all ages and all nations.

Those who preach this doctrine in all its fulness and encourage souls to tread this path by the assurance that God will come to their help with his grace, witness with joy the marvellous effects it produces. For it inspires higher ideals and a greater confidence. Souls learn to rely more on God and less on themselves; they gain in courage, grow rapidly in grace, and soon receive the firstfruits of mystical graces. Venerable Fr. Libermann speaks of having noticed this in his seminarists. and St Teresa and St John of the Cross have well expressed it in saying: "Without the sound of words

the Lord teaches them" (*Way of Perfection*, xxxv; *Spiritual Canticle*, st. 39). Souls attain in this way a far more sublime idea of God and a more intimate knowledge of their own helplessness, also of the beauty and extent of virtue, the value of suffering, and the need of sacrifice. God acts ever more directly on their will, enduing it with love and strength. Thus they attain to the unitive life, in which virtues are practised with facility and perfection; they render great glory to God, and their power of doing good, whether consciously or unconsciously, is increased a hundredfold. I myself am acquainted with many zealous and experienced priests who have witnessed with immense consolation the effects of this true doctrine of the saints. Retreat masters, too, who teach this doctrine, are more appreciated by the fervent and give them greater help.

In order to obtain these fruits of grace and to augment the number of souls thus closely united to God, many contemporary authors are labouring to bring mystical studies once more into favour, and fervent prayers are being offered to this end.

It is an undeniable fact that many, even among priests, to whom this ideal and this assistance are unknown, refrain from high aspirations. Instead of conquering and sanctifying their human nature they make concessions to it. Though good and virtuous, they are far from perfect, and seem to think that perfection is not for them. In the directing of other souls, also called to perfection, they know neither how to inspire them with high ideals or to teach them the duty of complete self-surrender. But by the law of God these are the very ones, his *élite*, who should lead the way in the supernatural region. Therefore it happens that God's chosen and privileged ones, priests, monks, and nuns, who should all be apostles at least by their prayers and sacrifices, do far less than they might for the extension of the kingdom of God. Out of the seventeen hundred million inhabitants on earth only three hundred million are Catholics, and many even among these do not practise their religion.

If the number of perfect souls in whom Jesus really

lives were what it should be, what an increase there would be in the number of good Christians!

But there is a certain danger in this beautiful mystic study. It has been indicated by Father Guibert in *La Revue d'Ascétique et Mystique* of April, 1921. "It is certain," he writes, "that in urging souls on to the mystical life we must reckon with the dangers of infatuation, of snobbishness, vanity, and spiritual indolence, which might lead to the abandonment of the painful tasks of asceticism in order to plunge at once into the mystical way." The Reverend Father is right; and it was such abuses which contributed in the seventeenth century to what M. Bremond calls "the retiring of the mystics." There will always be found those who, enamoured of a beautiful ideal, but not willing to employ the indispensable means for its attainment, recollection, humility, and mortification, will mistake for the mystical state what is really quite foreign to it.

It would, however, be folly to renounce the doctrine on this account. Railway catastrophes, automobile accidents, and the fatalities which befall so many aviators, will not make us give up new means of locomotion and return to the stage-coach of bygone ages.

The teaching of the saints, if faithfully followed, will supply the remedy for all illusions. Directors and all teachers of the doctrine of mysticism must insist on the practice of the fundamental virtues, and declare ruthless war on nature. Then we may safely join their ranks, and with benefit to the Church and ourselves, and to the glory of God, follow the path which they have marked out.

THE IDEAL OF THE FERVENT SOUL

PART I

THE END TO BE ATTAINED: PERFECTION

CHAPTER I

VIRTUOUS SOULS AND PERFECT SOULS

1. *The difference between the virtuous and the perfect.*

Is the number of the perfect as great as it ought to be? Is it what our Lord has a right to expect? Alas! We must sorrowfully confess that it falls far short of such an ideal. Both in the world, among the clergy, and in religious Orders of both sexes, there are found to-day many who are virtuous and pious, who are true servants of Christ, and possess a strong sense of duty, a sincere love of prayer and a fund of zeal and devotion; they spend themselves in their Lord's service, and are a source of light, help, and edification to others; there is a vast difference between them and the ordinary Christian who is satisfied with avoiding grave sins and fulfilling the essential duties of religion.

But there is also a great difference between such virtuous though imperfect Christians and those who are the perfect friends of God. The perfect soul lives continually in the presence of God; not one of its daily actions is influenced by human considerations, they are all inspired by motives of faith. Its love for God is the mainspring of its life. What good works it accom-

plishes, what prayers, what labours, what sacrifices! The pious soul, still divided between love for God and self-love, falls far below these heights of virtue. The labours of the latter may be praiseworthy, but they are not supernaturally inspired.

Moreover, the deep-seated habitual disposition in which the perfect soul abides, exercises an unconscious influence on all its acts. The ordinary disposition of the will varies greatly in different people. In him who is filled with divine love the habitual disposition is a fixed determination to live only for God, and to concede nothing to nature but that which God permits, and which is necessary for the fulfilment of his duties. This resolution is not the fruit of a passing ardour or of a heated imagination; it is confirmed by innumerable acts of renunciation and mortification, it has its abode in the depths of the will, it persists continually and subconsciously, and the least important acts of life performed in this disposition, which is that of perfect love, are of great value in the eyes of God.

The virtuous but imperfect soul may have done much in its life that has cost it dear; it may have struggled against defeats, practised faithfully the rule which it has embraced, and fulfilled the duties of its state. All these efforts and renunciations have developed its piety and strengthened its virtue; but still it has not acquired the courage to make every possible sacrifice; to restrain the activity of its imagination, to repress all human desires, temporal solicitudes, and purely natural joys and sorrows; it has not yet perfectly subdued nature in itself, but often yields to its demands and its repugnances. It still seeks its own satisfaction and avoids all that is distasteful. It desires the esteem and good graces of creatures, and dreads their blame. Consequently its actions are inspired more by self-love than love of God. Its fundamental disposition is on a lower plane than that of the perfect; it indeed wishes to please God and work for him, but without too much self-denial. This disposition diminishes the value of the actions of such a soul. It is like a faithful servant, attached to its master indeed, but more careful of its own interest than of his.

The perfect soul is more than a servant; she is a spouse of Jesus and the mother of other souls. The devoted and loving mother of a family considers her husband and her children first and foremost; she spends and sacrifices herself for them; she grudges neither pain nor fatigue, and never complains of her labours; she counts neither what she gives nor what she suffers, for both are the natural outcome of her love; her only concern is the happiness of those she loves. In like manner the soul united to God by perfect and pure love lives only for him and cares only for his interests, is always ready to be immolated for his glory, never spares herself, and feels that she cannot do enough for her Well-beloved.

The soul united to God performs these acts of love continually and habitually. How different is it with those who are pious but are not yet united to God; they are bored when alone; they seek distractions, conversations, news and unprofitable reading. Souls in union with God have a great love of solitude, for it is there that they find him and speak to him heart to heart.

The love of a soul in union with God grows with each multiplication of its acts of love, for love grows by exercising itself. The sacraments, pious exercises, prayers and trials are all, to the loving soul, as sparks which set fire to a mine; if the powder is of an inferior quality and small in quantity, the explosions will be slight; but if there is a great mass of dynamite they will be tremendous. Contradictions, humiliations, sickness,[1] and the loss of dear ones are all incidents

[1] *Pauci ex infirmitate meliorantur;* "Few are improved by sickness," says the *Imitation* (i, 23.) Sickness is often the criterion of true and solid virtue. The patient, disconcerted in his habits, thwarted in his tastes, deprived of the pastimes and natural satisfactions by which he has been wont to solace his troubles, is driven back on the last resources of his own heart. If he has fully renounced himself, his ascendancy over nature can be perceived; if on the other hand he is not yet dead to self, he shows quite plainly by his sadness, his impatience and unreasonable demands, that his nature has not yet been subdued, that his virtue has little depth, and that his love of God is still weak.

providentially designed to increase the love of the faithful, and their effect varies considerably.

The good and the pious suffering under contradictions to their self-will and wounds to their self-love, will meditate on the cause of this pain. They will endeavour to trace in such trials the hand of God, and will consider the advantages of suffering. Thus, either promptly or slowly and painfully, they will succeed in making acts of sincere resignation. But souls in union with God have no need of such reasoning and considerations; they experience an instant and loving acquiescence, produced not by their own efforts, but by the action of the Holy Ghost. Nature suffers, but the soul rejoices. How precious in the eyes of God is this simple, spontaneous, joyous, and abandoned love!

Every prayer produces effects of grace in proportion to the sentiments of faith, confidence, and love of him who prays. The perfect, who possess lively faith, great confidence, and pure love, derive a more abundant fruit from their exercises of piety than do the imperfect. The difference is greater still in the reception of the Sacraments. Penance and the holy Eucharist, the effects of which are in accordance with the dispositions of each recipient, fill the soul united to God with a measure of grace infinitely greater than that received by Christians who are good and pious, but not wholly surrendered to God.

The perfect, again, have a far truer conception of the grandeur, the goodness, and the perfections of God than have the merely pious; they are filled with admiration for a God so loving and so lovely, and the lights they receive on the divine loveliness increase their love. They are also more confident and familiar with their God. Jesus is to them not only a king and master, but a most tender friend. Prayer is not merely a series of reflections paving the way to good resolutions, it is their sweetest trysting-place with their Well-beloved. There they find supreme content, and they know that Jesus, whose love is far greater than their own, delights in their presence near him. Slight reasons will suffice the merely pious for dispensing with meditation, but the

perfect will only omit their prayer when it is impossible to make it; they will tend to render their whole life an uninterrupted prayer, and they will succeed.

The perfect are not only more enlightened concerning the charms of God, they are also more deeply convinced of their own misery and nothingness than those who are merely pious, and their profound humility renders them still dearer to God and attracts the most signal graces. Finally, the divine spirit enlightens them rapidly and surely as to the means whereby they may please God. They will avail themselves far more freely of occasions for renunciation than will persons of ordinary piety, and they know intuitively what will please or displease their divine and infinitely holy friend. They have all the delicacy of true love.

In comparing the good and virtuous but imperfect Christian with one who has attained perfection, there will be manifest in the latter the habitual disposition of doing all for God. His will is stronger and inspired by nobler motives, his acts of love are more generous, more intense, more tender, and more numerous. God measures all by love, therefore he takes more pleasure in one perfect soul than in many merely pious ones. The pious and virtuous man is a faithful, docile servant; the perfect man is the intimate friend of God. A loving, devoted friend gives more joy to the heart than a thousand good servants.[1]

2. *We both can and should aim at becoming perfect.*

Is it not presumptuous to aspire to perfection? Is perfection possible in this world? *In multis offendimus omnes*, "In many things we all offend," says the Apostle St James (iii, 2). Yet there is no temerity in aiming at perfection. The perfection of earth is not as that of heaven; the former does not exclude faults of pure

[1] The Fathers of the Church divided Christian souls into three classes: slaves, whom the fear of chastisement keeps in subjection; servants or hirelings, dominated by solicitude for their own interests; and children, who are actuated by pure love. This division corresponds to the ordinary classification of the purgative, the illuminative, and the unitive way. The unitive way is the way of pure love.

frailty, regretted and disavowed as soon as they are committed, and against the repetition of which we watch and pray. Religious ought to tend to perfection, for they assumed this obligation when taking their vows. All priests of the Lord, called to reproduce Jesus, the High Priest,—all pastors of souls should be perfect. It is also less difficult than one would imagine. "He who enters upon the way of perfection and does not abandon it," says St Alphonsus, "is sure, in time, to attain his goal" (*Complete Works*, vol. x, ch. vi).

Even if the number of the perfect is not so great as it should be, yet we have all met with some in this life, and in places where the formation of the spiritual life is well taught we shall find a remarkably large number of souls closely united with God and detached from self. They have freed themselves, as St Ignatius recommends, from every inordinate affection; they have renounced all that prevents the heart from giving itself entirely to God, which is, according to St Thomas, the condition and essence of perfection.

Through an unconscious jealousy these souls are not esteemed as they deserve. "You inform me," wrote St Vincent de Paul, "that the virtue of brothers So-and-so is a little burdensome to the others, and I believe it; but it is so only to those who are less zealous for their own advancement, and that of their brethren. The fervour of the former is a reproach to the cowardice of the others, who complain of their manner of acting because they lack the courage to imitate them" (*Life*, by Abelly, bk. iii, ch. xxiv). In other ways, too, these valiant souls may lay themselves open to unfavourable judgement. They are, perhaps, unable to rid themselves of some exterior defect in which their will has no part. Often, too, though masters of themselves and their passions, they continue to endure violent assaults from the demons who are infuriated against them; for them, as for all, these struggles are a means of progress whereby they win great victories, yet they produce a feeling of weakness which makes them realize their own helplessness. Such failings will diminish as they become stronger, and as their love increases, but at

present they are as shadows on the whiteness of their virtue.

How many there are who could have attained to these heights and who yet live on an inferior plane! Some, though pious, mingle much self-love with their love for God. Others are more advanced than Christians of ordinary piety; they are strong and resigned under trials, they resemble perfect souls, but they have not yet attained to that constant, intimate, familiar intercourse with the Saviour which is so pleasing to the heart of God.

Many of these servants of God lack neither goodwill nor courage; they have remained on lower planes of perfection only because they have not aimed high enough; their desire for perfection has not been sufficiently strong and persevering. The majority of these people avoid reading books which they believe to be too exalted for them, such as the works of St Teresa, St John of the Cross, or the *Treatise on the Love of God* by St Francis de Sales, all of which are so encouraging and so rich in teaching. Through want of proper guidance, therefore, they have not taken the way that leads most directly and surely to union with God, —the way of entire renunciation, of continual recollection, and of affectionate intercourse with Jesus. They are too much given to introspection, and instead of leading a life of confidence and love they think more of themselves than of God. The more generous among them, those ripe for eminent graces, when called by God to enter upon a more simple and salutary way, fail to understand that they must rely lovingly upon God alone, and must abandon themselves entirely to the action of the Holy Spirit.

On the other hand, many priests, educators, and spiritual directors do not hold up a sufficiently high ideal to those they would train in piety. They distrust the imagination of their disciples and occupy themselves chiefly in clipping their wings. "Extinguish not the spirit," says St Paul (1 Thess. v, 19). But these, fearing all that is mystical, and rating mortification as imprudence, violate the divine counsel; they do extinguish the Holy Spirit in hearts. Ah, if they only knew what good they

could do by inspiring souls with the desire for perfection, by sustaining their ardour, stimulating their generosity, and convincing them that God, who loves them with an infinite love, calls them to perfect detachment, and to a sweet and constant intimacy! "The measure of love," says St Augustine, "is to love without measure." Yet these directors, while desiring their disciples to advance in the love of God, really hinder instead of helping them. Perfect love is possible to us; it is offered to us; if we make it our aim to realize this holy ambition we shall attain thereto.

Those who urge souls on to scale the heights of perfect love procure the sweetest of pleasures for their Saviour. A saintly religious, Sister Marie Celeste, who, acting under revelation from God, had encouraged and guided St Alphonsus in the founding of the Institute of the Redemptorists, transmitted to him one day a consoling message. St Alphonsus was at that time tormented by horrible fears of damnation. She had had a vision in which she saw the throne of glory which was prepared for him in heaven, and heard Jesus saying to her, "Tell him how pleasing to me are his labours for the conversion of sinners and his leading of the just in the paths of perfection; for it is principally by the perfect that I am glorified, and through them alone can I dispense my mercies to the world" (*Life*, by Father Berthe, vol. i, ch. ix).

CHAPTER II

HOW GREATLY PERFECT SOULS GLORIFY GOD

1. *The perfect reflect the divine perfections.*

Jugis conatus ad perfectionem perfectio reputatur: ("He who makes constant efforts to attain perfection may be considered perfect"). These words of St Bernard (Epist. 254) may come as a surprise to many, yet they are true, for experience proves that only those whose love is already almost perfect will make constant endeavour to increase that love. Others, after a period of struggle, find their desires for perfection diminish; they no longer fight with the energy of the beginner, but rest content with the virtues they have acquired and make no further progress.

It behoves us, then, to cherish the holy aspirations of the soul and to fan them constantly into flame, for as St Francis de Sales has so well said, "In proportion as the desire for love grows love also increases. He who ardently desires to love will soon love with ardour" (*Love of God*, xiii, 2). The comparison that we have drawn between souls whose love is perfect and those who are merely virtuous, may well inspire a desire for perfection; but we would show more clearly still the blessings of perfection, and urge upon all to pursue them with courage and perseverance.

The perfect render great glory to God; God takes delight in them; they give sweet comfort to the heart of Jesus; they are as faithful assistants to him, working with him for the good of the Church and for the salvation and sanctification of others. Their love for God procures for them a profound peace and happiness on earth; in purgatory they still find happiness in expiation; in heaven their lot will be glorious, for they will share boundlessly in the wisdom, the love, and the felicity of God.

"God chose us before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy . . . unto the praise of the glory of his grace" (Eph. i, 4).

St Paul is so impressed with this truth that he repeats it three times. To glorify God by our virtues, such is the object of our lives. To this end has God endued us with so many graces.

A supernatural act is the most beautiful thing in the world; it is the masterpiece of God. When a creature performs a supernatural act of virtue he is incomparably more beautiful than all that is most exquisite in Nature, than the lakes, rivers and oceans, the valleys and mountains, the stars and all the splendour of the firmament. These indeed show the glory of God and proclaim his almighty power, but matter is only beautiful in that it reflects spirit. We see order, power, and grace in the pages of this book of Nature, but how immeasurably transcendent will be the ideal when it is no longer reflected in an imperfect mirror but visualized itself in the spiritual world.

The beauty of spiritual works is also enhanced by their liberty of action. The sea, the mountains, and the heavens have not the power to be other than they are created, but the virtuous soul is beautiful because it wills to be so. The Lord has wrought marvels in the making of this great universe out of nothing, but the material world could offer him no resistance. He works a far greater miracle in helping an intelligent creature to perform a virtuous act which he is at liberty not to perform. Although this act belongs to the creature who has freely accomplished it, nevertheless it comes from God, and is a manifest proof of his power, goodness, and wisdom. It is the more so because this supernatural work is generally effected against a natural inclination. There is as a rule more merit in the practice of virtue than there is malice in sin. For sin costs nothing; the sinner but yields to his inclinations. As the boatman, descending the river, has no need to row or to make any effort, so the sinner has only to follow the current of his corrupt nature in order to give himself up to vice.

It is quite otherwise with the soul that wills to be faithful to God. It must struggle against itself, do violence to itself, if it would attain to the perfection of love; and God, who sustains it in this struggle, derives more glory from a truly virtuous soul than he can ever be deprived of by a sinner.

No other work can compare in beauty with that which is divine. So, in the eyes of the angels and the elect, a faithful soul is a marvellous spectacle; they see in it all the virtues it has already practised, and the supernatural acts it has performed, what has been its part in these holy works and what the part in them of God. To God redounds the glory, he is glorified in his saints. *Mirabilis Deus in Sanctis suis.* Glory therefore be to Jesus, who, by his humiliations and sufferings, has merited for souls the graces which have sanctified them! Every soul saved is a trophy for the Saviour, every saintly soul a triumph of his love.

But how great is the glory given him by those who, deaf to the voice of Nature, spend their life in the practice of pure love! God delights in such faithful souls. He says to them, in due degree, what he said of his divine son: *Hic est Filius Meus dilectus, in quo mihi bene complacui* ("This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased"). The smallest actions of the perfect are ennobled by the complete union of their will with the will of God. As the gifts of the Holy Ghost are fully exercised in them, God's part in the virtues that they practise is much greater; they are already impregnated with the divine. What glory do such as these procure for the God who created them and the Saviour who redeemed them!

2. *The perfect are the beloved of the Lord.*

Perfect souls are a delight to God. God is so infinitely good that he loves even the most unworthy and ungrateful of his creatures; for them, as for all, he sent his Son on earth to endure the most terrible sufferings. He would fain pardon the most guilty sinners and admit them to his beautiful heaven; but for the truly faithful

he has a still more tender and benevolent love. Jesus, whose holy soul is inspired with the same sentiments as his heavenly Father's, cherishes an ardent affection for generous souls. He loves all his brethren; he shed his blood for them all, and would be ready to undergo again all the sufferings of his Passion for the most wretched sinner. But sinners wound his divine heart, and even the pious, though they have received so much from him, often disappoint him by their infidelities, their cowardice, and their coldness. Only ardent and devoted souls console him for the ingratitude of mankind, and the stronger, the more constant, and the purer their love, the greater the consolation they give him. They are, therefore, the dearest to his heart, for, as he is just and holy, he must love most those who most love him. *Ego diligentes Me diligo.* Who would not rejoice in the thought that he can give sweet consolation to Jesus and become one of his dearest friends? Even here below Jesus bestows on these his devoted friends great honour and immense favour. He associates them in his work of redemption, he makes them his chosen instruments. Like him and with him they are saviours of souls, for Jesus works always through his friends; he hides his action that theirs may appear, and lovingly effaces himself for their sakes. Has he not said "He that believeth in me, the works that I do, he also shall do; and greater than these shall he do"? (John xiv, 12).

When Jesus ascended into heaven he possessed but a few hundred faithful disciples. He left to his apostles the glory of working more numerous conversions, of founding churches, of conquering the world; and down through the ages he has always chosen generous souls to be the instruments of his grace.

Every perfect soul is therefore of great benefit to the Church, for such are powerful factors in her life, and their works are abundantly blessed by God; if they pass their lives in contemplation their prayers will draw down abundant grace to win sinners back to the way of life, to make the faithful more holy, and to render fruitful the apostolate of priests. These fervent

Christians are often of more benefit to parishes and communities than those who work directly for them, and to whom men give all the glory. Success in human enterprises, in business, and in art is due to the natural talents bestowed by God upon men, but in the divine works of conversion and sanctification it is grace which operates, and grace is the outcome neither of intelligence nor ability, but of holiness of life. It is given by God to his children according to the value of their prayers and the merit of their virtue. He who sacrifices all for the sake of God and lives for him alone, is therefore the greatest help to his brethren. Jesus said to St Margaret Mary, "A holy soul obtains pardon for a thousand criminals," and by holy he doubtless meant, as does Holy Scripture, a perfect soul. We shall never realize here below the great part played by the perfect in the work of the apostolate, for it is hidden, and the fruits thereof are oft brought to perfection far away from the labourers and unknown to them; only at the last day will they be revealed. What an incentive then to the striving for perfection should be found in its marvellous power for good.

CHAPTER III

THE BENEFITS OF PERFECTION

1. *The peace enjoyed by the perfect here below.*

Both effort and sufferings are necessary for the attainment of perfection. "Self-renunciation is not the work of one day, or child's play," says the *Imitation;* "forsake all and thou shalt find all, leave thy desires and thou shalt find rest" (bk. iii, ch. xxxii).

Yea, verily, those whose courage carries them valiantly through the struggle against natural inclinations enjoy their reward even here below. Their happiness will far exceed that of the less generous, who endeavour to combine the service of God with that of nature. The friends of Jesus must share in his cross but their detachment and humility will soften for them all contradictions and humiliations. Trials, also, such as heartaches, bereavements, and the like, though they may afflict their human nature, will not disturb their will, for it is absorbed in the will of God and finds happiness in enduring whatever contributes to his glory. But those who love little suffer greatly both in their nature and in their will when thwarted and contradicted; resignation is a tremendous effort to them, and affords them no joy, so the profound peace enjoyed by detached souls is unknown to them.

"My peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you," said Jesus to his apostles in his beautiful farewell discourse. How precious is this peace of Jesus, the Prince of Peace. St Paul tells us that it passes all understanding. As the peace which reigns in the depths of the ocean, while storms may rage on its surface, so is the peace of the soul who is at one with the will of God, and whose love and confidence remain calm and assured, even while its lower nature is exposed to temptations and trials of every kind.

It is more than peace, it is perfect joy that such faithful souls experience, the joy promised by Jesus to his apostles. "These things I have spoken to you that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be filled" (John xv, 11). It is the joy promised to prayer: "Ask and you shall receive, that your joy may be full" (John xvi, 24). Jesus himself begged this joy for his friends from his Father: "Father, I pray for them that they may have my joy filled in themselves" (John xvii, 13).

Joy is love satisfied. What is the desire of the man who has attained complete detachment? He desires God; him alone does he seek, and he finds him everywhere and always. He desires, too, the glory of God: he has an intense love for the will of God, which he knows to be always wise, good, and paternal. He knows, too, that this divine will is always accomplished, that this God, powerful as he is wise, always attains his ends, and this is for him a source of calm and profound joy. Sweet, too, is it to him to hold converse with God, to meditate on him, to feel his presence, to be united to him in love. Hearts that are divided cannot taste these sweet joys. Incapable of realizing the perfection and loveliness of God, they are less attracted to him; their attachment to creatures, to their business, and their occupations interferes with the pleasure they might find in God. They cannot know the happiness of those who love God intensely, and who realize how immeasurable is his love for them.

"To them that love God, all things work together unto good" (Rom. viii, 28). From all eternity divine Providence has prepared everything for those who love him. Those of less faith are often impatient under trials, and thwart God's design for them: they lack courage to make the sacrifices which God asks of them. The truly faithful soul profits by every sacrifice, and daily accumulates treasure for eternity.

2. The particular judgement of the perfect soul.

In the day of judgement the perfect soul will find in Jesus a friend rather than a judge.

Those, however, who have never learnt to die to themselves, and who are influenced by the opinions of men, are daily guilty of many faults, venial perhaps, but none the less wounding to the infinite holiness of God. The sum of these failings and weaknesses will form at the end of their lives an appalling total; so also will that of the means of santification which they have neglected. "To whom much has been given of him much also shall be required," says our Lord. Many graces would have been added to them if they had not thus put obstacles in the way. They have failed to attain to the high degree of virtue to which they were destined, and immediately after death they will realize this and be filled with poignant remorse. Such persons reassure themselves now and then by the comforting belief that at the moment of death they will make an act of perfect love, and so atone for their sins. Saints have indeed made such acts of love, but they are possible only to very holy souls.

Further, the value of acts of pure love varies according to the interior dispositions of those who make them. St Peter made an act of pure love when he told Jesus he was ready to die with him, but he made another of far greater value when he allowed himself to be led to death by Nero's myrmidons. That an act of love may be of value it is not enough to say with sincerity "My God, I love thee with all my heart, because thou art infinitely good and lovable," for what part in this act is played by the will of him who made it, what sacrifice is he disposed to make? Even if at the moment he is in the disposition of great self-denial and devotion, what is the constancy and depth of these sentiments? Only the Master knows; he alone can measure the purifying value of this act. We know only that the merit and the power of atonement possessed by acts of pure love are in proportion to the detachment from self of him who performs them, to his love for God, and his resolution

to sacrifice self and suffer all for his sake. It is not by great efforts of mind or heart that we shall succeed in strengthening our love, it is only by making generous sacrifices and accepting all trials cheerfully. It is therefore evident that those who desire to love God sincerely and who yet indulge in many human gratifications, though they may endeavour to make acts of pure love, will have to undergo a long and painful purification.

3. *The purgatory of perfect souls.*

Even generous and detached souls may have a debt to pay to divine justice, for Jesus tells us we must pay all, even to the last farthing. The Lord permits even his friends to suffer for their own purification, but he does so reluctantly, and cannot refrain from giving to his loved ones consolations which sweeten their trials.

He chastised Moses for his sin by condemning him never to enter the Promised Land, and when Moses besought his pardon we are told that the Lord became angry, and said, "It is enough: speak no more to me of this matter" (Deut. iii, 23, 26). Nevertheless, when the hour came that this faithful servant and holy friend of God must die, Jehovah made him climb to the summit of Mount Nebo, and from there, by a miraculous gift of vision, showed him all the land of Canaan and the beauty of it. Six hundred thousand Israelites were also condemned not to enter the Promised Land, but for none of them did the Lord perform this miracle.

For his faithful friends God mingles the favours of mercy with the severity of justice. It is probable, therefore, that even in purgatory these will receive consolations. God will reveal to them how greatly their generosity has pleased him, and how fruitful it has been for others, for every sacrifice made by a soul pleasing to God possesses great value. Suffering by way of expiation they must still endure, but it is mitigated for them by their love. The love of St Lawrence lessened the pains of his torment on the gridiron. The soul's capacity both for joy and suffering is immeasurably increased in purgatory; therefore, those who on earth

fied from suffering will find it more terrible in the next world, especially at the beginning of their expiation. As soon as death has done its work the divine will subjugates and overwhelms them; they can only submit, but they do so through constraint rather than from love. As they become purified, however, they gain a truer appreciation of the ineffable goodness and holiness of God and of the adoration which is due to him. Then their love for the divine will increases and they accept more generously the chastisements which it imposes upon them and which they know to be deserved.

"It was only after having been purified from the greatest stains that I was consoled with the knowledge of God's mercy," said a soul in purgatory to Mother Marie-Suzanne de Riants; "sufferings diminish as the soul is purified from the stain of sin" (*Holy Year of the Visitation,* Sept. 25).

Souls of ordinary virtue equally with the pious will eventually attain to the dispositions of the perfect, but their progress will be slow. Those who have loved sacrifice and have generously embraced the Cross have only slight faults to expiate and will suffer far less; free from the shackles of the body, their love can now be fully exerted; it becomes intensely ardent, and leads them to cherish the will of God and to accept his justice with exuberant joy.

CHAPTER IV

THE HEAVEN OF PERFECT SOULS

1. *The glory and happiness of the elect.*

The contrast which we have shown to exist between the merely pious and the perfect,—the difference in degree of their happiness on earth and their expiation in purgatory,—are only temporary; but there is another contrast which is eternal. St Teresa says, "The Lord made known to me how greatly in heaven the glory of one soul will differ from that of another" (*Life*, ch. xxxvii). This difference is tremendous, for God has proportioned it to the soul's merit, and the merits of perfect souls greatly surpass those of ordinary piety. The acts of the perfect soul, as we have already seen, possess incomparably more merit than those of any other. The value of an act of virtue is according to the nobility and purity of the love which inspires it. These will increase with generous exercise, and the love will thus grow in intensity and strength. The love of perfect souls is uniquely pure, generous, intense, and constant; consequently all the acts that they perform will be of correspondingly higher value than those of ordinary souls, and herein lies their wealth.

The eternal recompense of so many acts of exceeding merit will comprise all manner of blessings, exterior glory and intimate joys, the joy of love, the joy of glorifying God throughout all eternity, of having worked and suffered for him, and benefited the souls of others; finally, the supreme delight of contemplating God, of adoring him and sharing in his happiness, of loving him and being loved by him, and the ineffable, incomprehensible joy of possessing him.

And as to the exterior glory, "One is the glory of the sun, another the glory of the moon, another the glory of the stars. For star differeth from star in glory.

So also is the resurrection of the dead" (1 Cor. xv, 41). If the bodies of the elect will, as St Paul here affirms, shine with different degrees of splendour, so also will the souls, which communicate their glory to these bodies and far surpass them in beauty, differ in the degree of their splendour. "But they that are learned," said the angel to Daniel—that is, those who were wise enough to be faithful to God,—"shall shine as the brightness of the firmament; they that instruct many to justice, as stars for all eternity" (Dan. xii, 3). The greater the number of the souls they have sanctified the more marvellous will be their splendour. Each virtue will have its special lustre; nay, more, each act of virtue performed here below will add to the beauty of the soul and of the body in heaven. Each day may add to the lustre of our eternal beauty; even as the artist, working at his masterpiece, embellishes it daily with some new touch. Our prayers, our fidelity, and our sacrifices will all be as new rays in our future glory, and each of these rays will differ according to the virtues which have produced it. Marvellous effects can be produced by the blending of colours. The union of luminous rays forms white; white when decomposed gives the three primary colours of green, orange, and violet, from which again an infinite number of shades can be obtained, according to the skill of the artist. In like manner the spiritual rays of the soul and the less brilliant ones of the body, both of which are the products of our acts of virtue, will adorn us with a beauty beyond all earthly conception. Each virtue will have its own lustre, and the union of several virtues in one act will create a new shade. If we may push the comparison further, one ray will be greyer, because the intention has been less pure, or fainter because less energy has been employed. Others again will be more brilliant because the acts reflecting them have been more generous and more holy. The entire life of each will be shown in his person; and all these splendours will be divine; each act of virtue, having been a participation in one of God's attributes, will reproduce this attribute in the soul, and will thus transfigure and transform it into likeness to God.

This beauty will not be merely external, like that of earth, which may be found even in those who are afflicted with internal disease; no, the participation in the divine attributes, which will so magnificently apparel the soul, will also fill it to its depths with profound and unalterable joy. The most insignificant act of virtue will produce both its ray and its ineffable interior delight to all eternity.

But how describe these delights? How can we conceive of them, who know nothing that can even faintly portray their wonder? As well expect a blind man to comprehend the beauty and diversity of colour, or one who is deaf the sweetness and variety of sound. The power and goodness of God are marvellously exhibited even here on earth in magnificent and varied scenery, sweet harmonies, fragrant perfumes, and many other pleasures which our senses can enjoy; but in comparison with the joys of heaven these are but fleeting and imperfect pleasures: those with which the divine Power will bless the elect in heaven are spiritual and noble joys, ineffably sweet, and unfading. These joys, however, will not be bestowed in the same degree upon all alike, for those who have been the bosom friends of our Lord will enjoy them in far fuller measure than those who have only yielded him the obedience of good servants.

2. *The joys begotten by love and bestowed upon love.*

Although we cannot at present conceive of these varied and ineffable spiritual delights, we know that they have their source in love, the holy and intense love of the elect. These will taste the incomparable sweetness of having glorified God on earth by their good works and of glorifying him throughout eternity in heaven by the radiancy of their virtues. The keenly developed sense of joy of the perfect is the outcome of their love for God; the great desire to glorify God which they experienced on earth has in heaven become still more ardent, and they would willingly undergo any torture in order to procure him the smallest glory. St

Alphonsus Rodriguez relates in his *Life* that having prayed for brother Anglade, a novice who was greatly tempted to give up his vocation, and having obtained from Mary, by the efficacy of his supplications, grace which comforted the brother and enabled him to overcome his weakness, he experienced in the novice's victory the extreme joy of the blessed. Our Lord, too, teaches us that there is great joy in heaven over one sinner doing penance. All these joys spring from divine love and are evidently proportioned to the greatness of this love.

In like manner will the elect rejoice in having worked and suffered for God who suffered so much for them; but those who have lacked generosity and have sought to combine their own interests with the practice of virtue experience a far lesser degree of joy.

In heaven the elect will fully realize that God is the source of all good. But they will also perceive, though without complacency, the good which they themselves have accomplished: they will see in what measure they have been, as says the Apostle, "God's coadjutors;" how their labours, their example, their sacrifices, and their prayers have helped other souls; and they will love these souls who now share in their happiness with a love which they could never have imagined whilst on earth. What happiness they will experience in having helped in their sanctification, and in realizing what great benefits they have procured for them! Had they only helped them to make the smallest supernatural act these souls would owe them a debt of great happiness; how, then, will this be augmented if through their influence they have advanced in virtue and won real merit? We cannot now estimate what will be the joy of those ardent souls whose whole life here below has been spent in the exercise of a zeal inspired by abnegation and pure charity.

The beneficent power which the elect have exercised during their days of earthly trial, and from which they have derived all their happiness, does not desert them in the presence of God. "I will spend my heaven in doing good upon earth," said the gentle and heroic

St Teresa of the Child Jesus. And Holy Scripture clearly indicates that the elect do indeed participate in this power of the Lord. It is written in the Book of Wisdom (iii, 8) that the just whom God has tried upon earth and found faithful, who have been purified like gold in the furnace, will judge the nations. The same promise is made in the Apocalypse, "And he that shall overcome and keep my works until the end, I will give him power over the nations" (ii, 26). To the apostles, who left all things to follow him, Jesus promised that he would appoint them judges of the tribes of Israel. From all these texts it will be seen that to those who have practised perfect detachment, whose souls have been purified by trials bravely borne, who, as courageous and faithful soldiers of Christ, have fought to the end and won the victory, is promised participation in the Saviour's powers: they will rule over the peoples of the earth. This power they will exercise in assisting the faithful, and in exterminating wickedness. During the time of their trial the Lord gave to these his intimate friends the greatest proof of his love in granting them a share in those of his works which most rejoice his heart, works of mercy and loving-kindness, and he will not deprive them of this sweet joy now that they share in his triumph and his glory.

Neither will it be only on their earthly brethren that they will be able to shower their favours. Denis the Mystic tells us that the angels of the upper hierarchies diffuse lights and joys among those of less elevated and less joyous choirs. Will not the elect in the same way exercise their beneficent influence upon those of their companions in felicity who hold a lower place in the celestial hierarchy? They will also receive precious gifts from those who rank still higher than themselves. In heaven all the friends of God will share in his sentiments; they will feel a greater admiration and love for those who have shown a more constant fidelity to their divine Master, who have served and loved him best. Perfect souls are therefore more beloved of the saints than the imperfect, and experience greater joy therein. They are also more loved by Mary and by

Jesus, and are favoured with a greater share of his divine intimacies and his celestial embraces.

In their turn the perfect give greater joy to the holy friends of God who love them in proportion to their merits, rejoicing in their sanctity and felicity. They are the cause of sweet joy to their good mother Mary, and know the unutterable happiness of giving pleasure to the human soul of Jesus, who has so loved them and so suffered to merit graces for them. His pleasure in them also will be greater as they have the more benefited from his sufferings, and will be according to the degree of holiness and happiness which he beholds in them.

The supreme joy of heaven is to see God, to love God, and to possess God. This felicity, which is the essence of Paradise, is incomparably greater for those who have been perfect than for those who have possessed only an ordinary piety. Every act which the perfect have performed will, according to its value, have increased their capacity both of vision and of love. In heaven God is seen face to face. We shall no longer be limited to beholding him in his works, which are but signs and shadows of himself. However lofty the conception we had formerly entertained of God,—even had it been the equal of that of the upper hierarchy of angels,—our ideas in comparison with the reality are, as St Paul says, "only shadows." But in heaven God, the Infinite Being, is seen in himself; the soul grasps his infinite knowledge, his illimitable intelligence, which embraces all things, present, past, and future at a single glance, his infallible wisdom which foresaw all and ordained all in a single eternal act, his creative power to which nothing is impossible, his ineffable goodness, and that love of his which explains all his works, and which, if one of the perfections of God could be more beautiful than the others, would be the most ravishing of all. All these perfections shine upon the souls of the elect in differing degrees, according to each one's power of vision; the perfect soul will penetrate far more deeply than the imperfect into this infinite abyss of beauty, experiencing at the sight of each fresh marvel a still greater joy.

This ravishing vision of God also awakens in the heart of the elect a love equal in quality to their admiration; in the measure that one loves he desires to contemplate, and his contemplation responds to his love as does his love to his contemplation. The fire of love, which in heaven will consume the perfect soul, is to that of the imperfect as would be the conflagration of a forest compared with a candle's flame. All joy springs from love and is proportioned to it. Love desires union; the elect long to possess their God, and this desire is satisfied, for God gives himself to them, and each one of the elect receives him according to the capacity and intensity of his love. Souls who have received great graces, who are called to perfection, but who fail to attain it because they have not the courage to lead a life of sacrifice, humility, and charity, will never know here on earth what losses their resistance to grace has caused them to sustain for all eternity. The blessing, which they could have had in abundance, but which, on account of their weakness, can now be theirs only in small measure, is that of the knowledge, the love, and the possession of God.

CHAPTER V

JESUS LIVING IN US

1. *The intimate union between Jesus and the faithful soul.*

In studying the epistles of St Paul, we are at once struck with the form of salutation he most frequently employs. The first words from his pen, and according to chronological order the first written words of the New Testament, are these: "Paul and Sylvanus, and Timothy, to the Church of the Thessalonians, in God the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ." The Epistle to the Colossians is addressed to "The saints and to faithful brethren in Jesus Christ;" the Epistle to the Corinthians, to "Them that are sanctified in Jesus Christ;" that to the Philippians, "To all the saints in Christ Jesus;" that to the Ephesians, "To the faithful in Christ Jesus."

St Paul was the first to speak in this way, and he does so continually. "We are baptized in Christ Jesus," he says; "we are buried together with him by baptism into death . . . we have been planted together in the likeness of his death . . . in the likeness of his resurrection (Rom. vi, 3, 4, 5) . . . There is now, therefore, no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus" (viii, 1). He calls Aquila, Prisca, and Urbanus his "helpers in Jesus Christ" (xvi, 3, 9). Andronicus and Junias, he says, were "in Christ before me" (xvi, 7). "Salute them that are of Narcissus' household, who are in the Lord (11). I was unknown by face to the Churches in Judea, which were in Christ (Gal. i, 22). Of him are you in Christ Jesus (1 Cor. i, 30). We are his workmanship created in Christ Jesus" (Eph. ii, 10). It would take too long to cite all the passages in which the holy apostle represents the faithful as being one with Christ, incorporated in him and dwelling in him.

The following sentences, however, express his thought very clearly: "Know you not that your bodies are the members of Christ? (1 Cor. vi, 15). For as the body is one, and hath many members; and all the members of the body, whereas they are many, yet are one body, so also is Christ (xii, 12). Christ is our head. From whom the whole body, being compacted and fitly joined together, by what every joint supplieth, according to the operation in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body, unto the edifying of itself in charity (Eph. iv, 16) . . . the head, from which the whole body, by joints and bands, being supplied with nourishment and compacted, groweth unto the increase of God" (Col. ii, 19).

The Saviour himself proclaims the intimate union between himself and the soul in the words: "I am the vine, you are the branches . . . he who dwelleth in me and I in him, beareth much fruit, for without me —(separated from me)—you can do nothing."

2. *Jesus the source and means of grace.*

We see, then, that intimate union between Jesus and the soul is the first principle of the supernatural life. Jesus is its motive power and its inexhaustible source. From him does grace flow into our human souls: "And of his fulness we all have received, and grace for grace" (John i, 16). "Christ," says St John Chrysostom, "has no rival in giving. He is himself the source and root of all good. He is the Way, the Light, and the Truth. He does not guard his treasures for himself, but bestows them upon all, and having poured them out, he is still as rich in grace as before, an ever-flowing, never-failing spring. The share of each one of us in this fulness is but as a drop drawn from an unfathomable abyss, a limitless ocean. Nay, even this simile is imperfect, for should you take a drop from the ocean you would, even though imperceptibly, diminish its volume; but of this source we can only say: 'Draw what you will from it, it will never grow less'" (*In Joan. Hom.* 14).

But how does Jesus become the source of all grace for us?

In the first place he has beyond all measure merited to be so. The Word of God became man to expiate the sins of men, and as the actions and sufferings of his humanity partake of his divinity, they possess infinite merit, and more than suffice to pay the debts of the whole human race. For humanity, verily and indeed, was this merit acquired, for by the will of God every action in the life of Christ was performed for us; thus do inexhaustible springs of grace flow to us from Jesus.

And in what way do they come?

Those who believe that Christ's humanity is instrumental only morally in the conferring of grace, say: "Jesus Christ unites himself to man, covers him with the mantle of his dignity, and asks from his Father on behalf of each: 'Do for them what you have done for me, bestow on them that sanctifying grace which is a part of your divinity, transform the creature into the likeness of the Creator, let them share my title of Son of God, and my inheritance.'" But Holy Scripture teaches us to go farther even than this, and to believe that divine grace co-operates in us even physically through Christ, that God himself pours grace into the soul through the humanity of Christ, which is his instrument. "The instrument," says St Thomas, "may be distinct from its employer as is a stick from the hand which holds it, but the hand is one with its agent, God is the producing cause of grace, but the humanity of Christ and the sacraments share in his work." Such is the doctrine of St Thomas and of most other theologians.

Jesus pours grace into the souls of sinners, both actual and sanctifying grace, with its virtues and gifts; and this action implies presence and contact; it signifies a veritable union between Christ and man. This union is, indeed, of so exalted and intimate a nature that human language is inadequate to describe it; it is a mystery of faith; we realise how close are its bonds, but we cannot comprehend its nature.

3. *Jesus desires union with us because he loves us.*

The desire of Christ for union with the soul is the fruit of the ineffable love of the eternal Word for mankind, his brethren; the doctrine of the mystical body is closely allied with that of the sacred heart.

Love is a unitive force, *vis unitiva*. "Love," says St Francis de Sales, "is nothing else but the union of the lover with the beloved." Love moves the Word Incarnate to draw into his strong embrace all the souls he came to save, to hold them closely there, and to communicate to them his life and his possessions. This union is first realized in baptism. "The Christian," says St Leo, "is never the same after baptism. He has been taken possession of by Christ; he is so bound to Christ that the flesh of the baptized has become the flesh of the Crucified" (*Sermo* 14, *De Passione*).

But this union of baptism does not satisfy the heart of Jesus. His institution of the holy Eucharist shows his ardent desire for a still more intimate union. "There," says St Chrysostom, "he blends himself with us, he gives us his body that we may be one as the head and body are one; such union is the fruit of ardent love" (See *Breviary*, Saturday within the octave of Corpus Christi).

We, too, yearn to be thus united with him. Sweet indeed is it to faithful hearts to watch before the tabernacle; sweeter still to contemplate the Sacred Host exposed for their adoration. In order to draw near to God the fervent will make any sacrifice and will tear themselves away from all other occupations. But even this joy does not satisfy; we aspire to receive our Saviour into our inmost being, we thirst for Holy Communion, and the eucharistic banquet produces in us the liveliest and deepest emotion.

If, then, our human feelings are so strong, what must the desire for union be in the heart of Jesus, whose power of loving is so incomparably greater than ours? We cannot conceive how greatly our Lord longs to unite himself to human beings, but we know that

through the supremacy of his will he is able to accomplish this union within certain bounds. Ever considerate of the liberty of his creatures, he unites himself with them in bonds more or less intimate, as they themselves may meet or resist his advances. To each he offers complete union, but he knows that many, alas, will never accept it. These loving advances of the heart of Jesus, and the rights which he has acquired over souls by his sufferings for them, create a bond between him and even the most sinful. Our Lord said to Blessed Battista Varani: "I am the head of a body of which all Christians are members, but many of them have been torn from me by mortal sin."

Our Lord also calls to perfect union all who are one day to be converted. They may not yet be united to him even by faith, but they are the objects of his solicitude and of his loving hope. Those who believe in him, even though they may still be in sin, are closer to him than unbelievers; but it is an imperfect bond, for the divine sap of grace cannot flow into these broken branches. The truly vivifying union is that which exists between Christ and the faithful soul into which the Saviour pours all the plenitude of his divine life. Happy, indeed, are these perfect ones, to whom Jesus thus gives himself, communicating to them his thoughts, his sentiments, and his virtues, helping them to accomplish his desires, acting in them and through them. It is through these, his intimate friends, that he continues his great work in the world, as says St Paul: "I fill up those things that are wanting of the sufferings of Christ in my flesh, for his body, which is the Church" (Col. 1, 24).

Even this blessed union, however, is not perfect. The only one that merits this title is the union between Jesus and his elect.

The union with our Lord in Holy Communion is as intimate a one as is possible here below; but it is transient and mysterious, the Word being hidden under the veil of the sacramental species. Union above will be eternal, and the liveliest joy imparted by Sacramental Communion to holy souls is but a shadow of the joys

celestial. In heaven the elect will be veritably and indeed members of Christ; he will be all in all (Col. iii, 11). There the mystical body of Jesus will be revealed in perfect unity and dazzling splendour.

This intimate union of love which the heart of Jesus forms with his creatures is reflected in his words on the great precept of fraternal charity: "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself," and their corollary, "All that you shall do to the least of my brethren ye do it unto me. . . . I was hungry and you gave me to eat, thirsty and you gave me to drink, I was homeless and you sheltered me, naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me."

4. *How we should maintain our union with Jesus.*

Spiritual authors of the seventeenth century have drawn most consoling and beautiful applications from this doctrine of the mystical body of Christ. Listen to St John Eudes (*Kingdom of Jesus*, 2nd part): "Jesus, Son of God and Son of Man, is not only God, our Saviour, and our Sovereign Lord, he is also our Head, and we the members of his body. As says St Paul, 'of his flesh and of his bones' (Eph. v, 30). If we are united with Jesus in so intimate a union, spiritually by faith and by the grace given in holy baptism, corporally by the union of his most sacred body with ours in holy Eucharist, it necessarily follows that we must be animated with the spirit of Jesus, live according to his life, walk in his paths, and continue and complete his life of religion and devotion."

These words of St John Eudes are as an echo of those of the great apostle St Paul: "Put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom. xiii, 14). "Put ye on the new man" (Eph. iv, 24). "Let this mind be in you that was also in Christ Jesus" (Phil. ii, 5).

St John Eudes quotes numerous texts in confirmation of his doctrine. "Listen," says he, "to the words of him who was the Truth itself: 'I am the Way: I am come that you may have life: you will not come to me that you may have life: I live and you shall live:

in that day you shall know that I am in my Father, and you in me, and I in you'" (John xiv, 6; x, 10; v, 49; xiv, 19, 20).

The beloved disciple also proclaims that "God has given us eternal life, and this life is in his Son." "He that hath the Son hath life. He that hath not the Son hath not life" (1 John v, 11, 12). "God hath sent his only begotten Son into the world that we may live by him" (1 John iv, 9), and "As he is, we also are in this world" (1 John iv, 17). We occupy his place and should live as he has lived.

In the Apocalypse Jesus, the Spouse of the soul, cries to us, "Come unto me; he that thirsteth, let him come, and he that will, let him take the water of life freely" (Apoc. xxii, 17).

Listen again to the message of St Paul: "Ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God (Col. iii, 3). God has quickened us together in Christ (Eph. ii, 5). Christ is our life (Col. iii, 4). I beseech you that you walk worthy of the vocation in which you are called . . . for the edifying of the body of Christ" (Eph. iv, 1, 12).

To be one with Jesus, that he may work, suffer, and pray in us, to be accounted his members and his instruments, what an inspiration is here! Working, suffering, or praying alone, we are overwhelmed by the feeling of our own unworthiness, and of how little we can do for God's glory. Let us then unite ourselves with Jesus and ask him to perform those sacred duties in us; so will fresh courage fill our hearts, for Jesus will hear and answer our call and will give to all our works a dignity, a merit, and an efficacy which without him they could never attain.

"We must consume all," writes St Margaret Mary, "in the burning furnace of the sacred heart of our adorable Master, and having made a holocaust of our own corrupt human heart in this divine flame of love, we shall draw thereout a new one which will enable us to live a new life. . . . The divine heart of Jesus must be so substituted for ours, ours so subjugated to his, his affection, his thoughts, his desires, and above

all his love so take the place of our own that he will love his own image in us (*Works*, t. xi, p. 468).

We all know the beautiful prayer of M. Olier: "O Jesus, living in Mary, come and live in us, in the sanctity of thy spirit, in the fulness of thy power, in the perfection of thy ways, in the purity of thy virtue, in the communion of thy divine mysteries; subdue in us the power of the enemy by the virtue of the Holy Spirit, and for the glory of thy Father."

As Jesus thus communicates his virtues to us, God will see in each of us no longer the creature in his misery, but a faithful image of his divine Son in whom he is well pleased.

Let us then strive to live in union with him; joining our intentions to his perfect intentions, our prayers to his prayers, our imperfect works and sufferings to his perfect ones, constantly subjecting our will to his and acting in all things as he would. He himself will do the rest; he will further our efforts and will fill us with his grace; he will communicate to us his light, his love, and his strength, urging us on and guiding us in the way of perfection. He will make us other Christs, that we may say, "I live, now not I, but Christ liveth in me" (Gal. ii, 20).

CHAPTER VI

THE TRANSFORMATION OF THE SOUL INTO LIKENESS WITH GOD

1. *God desires to imprint his image on man.*

A PERFECT definition of the spiritual life is embodied in the following words: it is the union of grace and of the human will working together to bring about a perfect assimilation of the soul with God. The holy doctors tell us that spiritual life is union with and transformation of the soul into God.

"Let us make man to our image and likeness," said the Lord on the day of creation. Original sin destroyed the divine plan, but God resumed his work and continues it in each one of us. Reunion with God begins at baptism; there God pours into the soul sanctifying grace with its virtues and gifts. This emanation from the Deity penetrates both the substance and the faculties of the soul, giving to the first a divine beauty, and to the second the power of acting divinely: the soul, having thus become "partaker of the divine nature" (2 Pet. i, 4), is made capable of acts of virtue, and is enabled by the grace of God to grow in likeness to himself.

God's aim is to reproduce himself in us. As heat warms and as light illumines, so does God deify the soul. Each divine attribute operating in her increases this likeness; his wisdom makes her wise, his mercy, compassionate; his long-suffering teaches her patience, his truth, humility; his purity cleanses her, and his love inflames her. Every act of virtue she performs manifests her communion with one of his perfections. Each sin, on the other hand, witnesses a divine attribute repulsed, a work of God impeded. For both men and angels, having been created with a free will, have the sad power of tying the hands of God . . . for a moment.

But for a moment only, for with death God resumes

his work. The barriers which human liberty set up are broken down, and his divinity acts with a power the more terrible for having been impeded. The obstacles which the soul had placed in his way still, however, exist. Penance has not intervened to destroy them, therefore the divine power, its freedom regained, concentrates all its energy on the consuming of these obstacles.

If they are of the nature of mortal and unrepented sins, implying rebellion against God, the divine attributes, eternally carrying out their work of justice, will be as a fire consuming the damned, and will continue their avenging action so long as the sinner remains perverse and rebellious. For God, who is omnipresent, works in all his creatures. In those who use their free will to perfect his image in themselves he infuses purity, holiness, and love; but in the sinner the divine action, clashing with the rebellious will, which has stubbornly opposed itself to all that is holy, pure, and lovely, causes inexpressible torture.

If at length this will, renouncing evil, turns itself towards God, the divine attributes will speedily consume the obstacles in the way of their loving action, and will efface in the soul the stains that have hitherto dimmed its brightness. But they cannot, before death, give it the splendour of the soul who has always surrendered itself to their action, and the process of reforming and purifying which takes place in purgatory will be the more painful as resistance to grace has been more obstinate and prolonged.

Mother Francis of the Mother of God, a saintly Carmelite of the seventeenth century, saw in a vision the flames of purgatory, and that some souls needed a long immersion therein to purify them. Our Lord told her that these had shown but little fervour in his service, therefore his justice could only purify them little by little.

Every action and every thought which wilfully checked the flow of divine life in us must therefore be food for the avenging flames.

Happy those who, awaiting not the flames of purga-

tory, endeavour while here below to become faithful mirrors of God; in whom each divine attribute bears fruit, and is lovingly accepted by the soul as a gift from God. God says as it were to his creature: "Do you desire to be illumined with my light, to share my goodness, my charity, my patience? It will entail suffering to your perverted nature, but your reward will be to become more and more like myself." The faithful soul accepts the offer whole-heartedly, divine power is communicated to it, and it shares in the perfection of God.

This communion may be continual, for with every act of virtue performed divinity flows into the soul, which being a vase of immense capacity, and drawing from an infinite ocean of perfection, thus acquires incalculable wealth. Divinity then fills the soul, its beauty transfigures, its power strengthens, its holiness perfects and sanctifies it.

But there are many differing degrees of participation in the divine attributes. In the early days of spiritual life the soul is occupied with the struggle against vicious inclinations and the shunning of sinful acts; is obliged to reflect and reason in order to avoid evil and do good. Virtue thus practised is, as always, the work of divine grace in conjunction with free will, but in the midst of these throes of a mind seeking light,—these struggles of a will still feeble,—grace cannot fully exercise its power, and the divine attributes can only reproduce themselves in an imperfect manner.

2. *We must renounce all that interferes with our resemblance to God and yield ourselves up to be purified.*

The first duty of the Christian is to destroy within himself all that is opposed to the action of grace. By thus struggling against his faults and making generous sacrifices he will weaken his evil tendencies and strengthen his good dispositions. Every victory will win for him new graces, new lights, and fresh faith. He is now in the way of holiness, and has attained to a high degree of virtue; his difficulties have diminished, and his resemblance to God is already apparent.

There may still, however, be found in him impediments to the free action of grace, such as self-complacency, self-seeking, secret attachments to worldly pleasures, and a yielding to purely natural desires, sorrows, and joys. All these are in no way divine, and prevent perfect union of man with God.

Those who would be holy must learn to renounce self unceasingly. "When we empty ourselves of self," said St Vincent de Paul, "God will fill us with himself, for he cannot suffer us to be empty" (*Life*, by Abelly, bk. i, ch. xxi). We see in *Les Divines Paroles*, 30, 25, how "The Lord promises to fill with his gifts those who are wholly emptied of self." St Jane Frances de Chantal also says, "The more we empty ourselves of all that is not God, the more will he fill us with himself" (*Works*, t. iii, p. 246). Self-renunciation alone is fruitful! The emptying of the mind and heart of all that is not divine and supernatural will win for holy souls the gifts of God.

Nevertheless, even those who thus labour faithfully cannot attain to complete purification of mind and heart except the Lord come to their help in sending them trials, severe, perhaps, and prolonged, but always eminently wholesome. Holy Scripture teaches us that the just soul must be freed from her impurities like gold which is passed through fire. "The Lord knoweth my way," said holy Job to Eliphaz, "and has tried me as gold that passeth through the fire" (Job xxiii, 10). "As silver is tried by fire and gold in the furnace, so the Lord trieth the hearts" (Prov. xvii, 3). "The souls of the just are in the hand of God . . . though in sight of men they suffered torments . . . God has tried them and found them worthy of himself; as gold in the furnace he hath proved them" (Wisdom iii, 1-6). "Gold and silver are tried in the fire, but acceptable men in the furnace of humiliation" (Eccles. ii, 5). In Zacharias (xiii, 8) after having declared that he will chastise the guilty, the Lord, speaking of those who are faithful, says, "I will bring the third part through the fire, and will refine them as silver is refined, and I will try them as gold is tried." "The Lord," says

Malachias (iii, 3), "shall sit refining and cleansing the silver, and he shall purify the sons of Levi, and shall refine them as gold and as silver, and they shall offer sacrifices to the Lord in justice." "Wherein you shall rejoice," writes St Peter, "if now you must be for a little time made sorrowful in divers temptations; that the trial of your faith, much more precious than gold which is tried by the fire, may be found unto praise and glory and honour at the appearing of Jesus Christ" (1 Pet. i, 7). "Dearly beloved, think not strange the burning heat which is to try you, as if some new thing happened to you" (*ibid.* iv, 12).

Purifying grace is, then, a necessity. It must come before transforming grace. Whenever, in order to increase the soul's likeness to himself, God deigns to accord it the most elevating graces, he first prepares it for their reception by trials that consume the elements of impurity within it; and the further the soul advances in holiness, the more rigorous will these purifications become. Undoubtedly in the designs of God such trials serve to increase the merits of the just and to give power to their intercession for their brethren; but at the beginning of the spiritual life they are also salutary for the freeing of the generous servants of God not only from sin, but from all within them that is too natural and human. All natural eagerness and ardour are obstacles to the communication of grace and to perfect union of the soul with God. Souls that have made but little progress in the path of renunciation think themselves severely tried when their self-love is humiliated, when they suffer disappointments, privations or physical pain. These are indeed real trials, but they touch only the surface of the soul. To become possessed of true virtue it must suffer far more than this, and must be probed to the very depths.

3. *The soul which is purified becomes like to the divine.*

The salutary trials mentioned above always abound in the lives of the great friends of God. One of these saints in whom we can plainly trace both the purifying

and transforming mark of grace is M. Olier. Already possessed of an heroic love of God, he had, by ten years of rigorous penances and by the constant practice of virtue, attained to great sanctity, when he was suddenly reduced to a state of complete impotency. His faculties became paralysed, his intelligence deadened, his will enervated. From this he learnt that he was no longer to take pleasure in the exercise of his talents, or to rely on his natural capacities, but must learn to abandon himself to the action of grace alone.

God then granted him the favour of an extraordinary union with Jesus Christ, and the fullest possible participation in his divine attributes. "In this state it seemed," said he, "that both my natural and my interior self were one with their divine Head, while my soul recognized no other principle of action and feeling than Jesus Christ living and acting within her. He was my guide even in the use of my natural faculties and in the movements of my unruly body. The spirit of my Master directed me even in my bearing, my walk, and my speech; in writing he regulated the movements of my hand. I surrendered myself to him as if I were an instrument with no motive power of its own. He was diffused throughout my whole being. Like a second soul he animated and bore me on, directing, as does the natural soul, the movements of my body, but with far greater sweetness and power. I felt the same change with regard to the powers of my soul, and all my supernatural gifts. In place of thick darkness I had light; for confusion of mind, clearness of thought; for desolating aridity, consolation; for wretched self-preoccupation, an uplifting of my heart in love to God. I knew from whence all this came; it was the divine Spirit which filled and possessed me" (*Life*, by Fallion, first part, l. viii).

Few souls in this life attain to so perfect a union with God. For the greater number, so long as they are in the prison of the body, such union is but foreshadowed. For those in the purgative way it is scarcely initiated. In the illuminative way it is still incomplete. But in the unitive way, where the gifts of the Holy Ghost work

in abundance, the soul, enlightened, inflamed, and penetrated with the divine Spirit, participates largely in divine perfection.

It is to souls in such union with God that the great saying of St Paul applies: "But we all, beholding the glory of the Lord with open face, are transformed into the same image from glory to glory, as by the Spirit of the Lord" (2 Cor. iii, 18). This image is the likeness of Christ; little by little our own actions yield to those of Jesus, and we become thus ever more faithfully the image of God. This transformation is the work of the Holy Spirit, which transfigures us and impels us to mount from splendour to splendour.

If at the moment of death our likeness to God is not complete, it must be completed in the place of expiation. But if this work has been zealously pursued on earth its accomplishment there will be less painful. The imperfections to be removed will be fewer, and the holy dispositions of the faithful soul, which make it already a partaker in the light and love of God, will sweeten its sufferings. In heaven the soul will experience the beatifying effects of the divine attributes, for there all things are redolent of joy and happiness. These blessed souls, from whom all stains have been removed, are now perfectly transfigured and deified. In the measure that they desired them upon earth they now share in the perfections of God. As they then corresponded with the divine action upon them, so are they now divinely blessed.

"Dearly beloved," cries the Apostle St John (1 John iii, 2), "we are now the sons of God, and it hath not yet appeared what we shall be; we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like to him; because we shall see him as he is." Christ, who is all in all, will manifest himself to his elect. "In that day you shall know that I am in my Father, and you in me and I in you" (John xiv, 20) . . . "I am in the Father and the Father in me" (*ibid.* 10). Jesus, who lives in his Father and in whom his Father lives, will live in us. There will be a marvellous and ineffable union between God and his children; while leaving to each his personality and his

liberty, God will penetrate and transfigure his elect. We shall live in him, move in him, exist in him; we shall be sustained by him; our thoughts, our wills, our actions will proceed simultaneously from him and from ourselves; and being in everything purified, enlightened, and inflamed with love, we shall then be worthy of God. Without ceasing to be his creatures we shall become divine, transformed into God; and his design, that which he announced at the time of creation, will be fully accomplished, "Let us make man to our image and likeness." As says St Paul in 1 Corinthians xv, 28, "God will be all in all."

PART II

HOW TO ATTAIN TO PERFECTION

CHAPTER VII

DIVINE GRACE

1. *Divine predestination and human co-operation.*

"GOD will have all men to be saved" (*Deus vult omnes homines salvos fieri*) (1 Tim. ii, 4). "*It is not the will of your Father, who is in heaven, that one of these little ones should perish*" (Matt. xviii, 14). To all he offers grace sufficient for salvation. He has not willed, *a priori*, and with foreknowledge of their merits and sins, to save some and condemn others. It was not his will that Peter should be saved and Judas perish. No; God in his great love desires the salvation of all, and to each lost soul he can say: "*What is there that I ought to do more for my vineyard, that I have not done to it?*" (Isa. v, 4).[1]

But though God desires the salvation of all mankind and offers to all graces sufficient thereunto, he does not accord to all the same measure of grace. Master of his gifts, he, in his inscrutable and infinite wisdom, predestines some to the reception of great graces, others to be endowed with far lesser ones. In this choice he is not guided by any foreknowledge of the great or lesser degree of fidelity shown by the recipients; no reason can be assigned other than his good pleasure and his unfathomable wisdom. In all that he does for

[1] Let those who are troubled concerning the mystery of predestination recall the words of St Augustine: "Who are the elect? You, if you so desire. (*In Evang. Joan.*, tr. 26, No. 2). Has heaven been prepared for others? Be thou amongst them, and it will be thine." (*In Ps.* 126, 4.)

the less-favoured, he is ever guided by goodness and love, and even those miserable ones who abuse his grace are constrained to acknowledge that they have been the objects of his benefits. "No soul is lost," said our Lord to a saintly Carmelite of Bethlehem, Mary of Jesus Crucified, "with whom I have not pleaded a thousand times."

Undoubtedly God foresees that obstinate sinners will not respond to his advances, that they will perish by their own choice; but he still maintains the decree by which he called them into existence, and determined to give them the help necessary to work out their salvation. For he, the Sovereign Master, cannot be dependent on his subjects, nor allow his designs to be hindered by their ill-will. We cannot expect him, before bestowing his favours upon his creatures, to prostrate himself before them and ask them humbly which ones they would prefer. "For then," says St John Damascene, "sin would have authority over God and limit his power" (*Orth. Faith*, bk. iv, ch. xxi).

Thus both the measure and the nature of the grace imparted to each depends on the good pleasure of God. Like the king in the parable, he gives to one five talents, to another two, to another one, and he who had received more could gain more.

But God has made man free, and he respects his liberty. By virtue of this freedom, therefore, man may choose either to correspond with divine grace, which will then become for him an ever-widening stream, or by his resistance and his negligence he may raise barriers in its path and stem the torrent of divine liberality. Holy writ gives many examples of the different ways in which the grace of God has been accepted. Mary and Zachary each received a divine message through the medium of the angel Gabriel. Mary at once believed the angel's words; Zachary, to whom a lesser miracle was announced, was incredulous. Isaac and Ismael received the same education, but did not profit to the same extent thereby; so also was it with Jacob and Esau and with Joseph and his brethren. Interior grace may, indeed, from the first have been

more powerful in Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph, for though exterior graces may be impartially bestowed, their effects will vary according to the correspondence thereto of interior grace in the soul, and the degree of its fidelity. In the parable of Jesus concerning the talents, the servants all received the same sum, one talent; but while one among them increased it to ten and the second to five, the third produced no fruit whatever. "If in Tyre and Sidon had been wrought the miracles that have been wrought in you, they had long ago done penance in sackcloth and ashes," says our Lord. We see by this that we may correspond faithfully with grace received, we may weaken it and cause it to bring forth little fruit, or we may render it completely sterile. St Paul rejoices that the grace of God in him has not been made void (*Gratia ejus in me vacua non fuit*) (1 Cor. xv, 10). What a terrible power, alas, is this, to be able to render the grace of God of no effect! God in his infinite mercy stoops down to us; enlightens and strengthens us; he encourages us to perform acts of virtue, to make sacrifices, to labour with him at some work of supernatural courage, which will glorify him and benefit ourselves, and it is possible for us to stultify his desire. It is his mercy even that offers us this grace. We have no right to it, nothing in our life could deserve it; it has been merited for us by Jesus alone. For this did the eternal Word descend from heaven, humiliate himself, and suffer death upon the cross. The most fugitive of good thoughts, the least desire for things spiritual, is the fruit of the blood of Jesus.

What a terrible responsibility, then, is ours if we render fruitless the grace which cost Jesus so dear! What is our ingratitude and folly if the work to which this grace urges us should be one of real obligation, resistance to which would constitute a mortal sin; and the greater and more abundant the grace, the greater the responsibility. Hence, the terrible maledictions pronounced in Holy Scripture against those who abused great graces. "Woe to thee, Corozain! Woe to thee, Bethsaida! It shall be more tolerable for Tyre and

Sidon in the day of judgement than for you!" Yet the cities of Tyre and Sidon were notorious for their corruption, and were often cursed by the prophets. "And thou, Capharnaum, shalt thou be exalted up to heaven? Thou shalt go down even unto hell. . . . But I say unto you that it shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom in the day of judgement than for thee" (Matt. xi, 21).

The recipients of great graces cannot be content with mediocrity or remain merely ordinary Christians. They must either rise to heights of virtue or they will sink into depths of sin. There were no halfway measures among the apostles of Jesus; all save one profited by his graces to become great saints; one rebelled and became a monster of iniquity.

One day Mother Mary of the Divine Heart made the following confidence to a religious: "It has been revealed to me," said she, "that a certain priest will become either a saint or a demon." Alas! Events proved that she was not mistaken. He refused to become a saint, and some years later he greatly distressed German Catholics by his public apostasy; he became a friend of the Kaiser and an enemy of the Church.

It is not only by obstinate rejection that we render the grace of God fruitless and diminish its flow, but also by our neglect thereof and our indifference. "Neglect not the grace that is in thee," says St Paul (1 Tim. iv, 14). What legions of perfect souls there might be on earth to-day, were it not for neglect of grace! "Why is it then," asks St Francis de Sales, "that we are not so advanced in the love of God as are St Augustine, St Francis, St Catharine of Genoa, or St Frances of Rome? Theotimus, it is because God has not given us the grace. And why has he not done so? Because we have not corresponded as we should to his inspirations" (*Love of God*, ii, 11). And the holy doctor makes this further comparison: "If we are given a remedy and do not take it, we thereby nullify its efficacy; or perhaps we only take a portion, so that it does not produce the effect it should, and we suffer by our own fault."

It is the same with grace: it demands much. If we accord only a portion of what it asks, and that not generously but grudgingly, it will not produce the salutary effects ordained by God, but through our fault will yield but little fruit. "One fervent act," wrote St Ignatius to the Jesuits of Coimbra, "is worth more than a thousand performed half-heartedly." For instance, grace impels us to pray, but we may pray without intention or fervour, because such prayer implies effort, and effort means trouble. Grace urges a perfect performance of the duties of our state; we prefer to discharge them with indolence and laxity. Grace inspires the spending of ourselves for our neighbour, the sacrifice of self for the sake of giving pleasure and doing good; but if we practise self-denial at all, we do it reluctantly. And thus we neglect grace. We may refuse to listen to the voice which urges privations and mortifications, when such are not obligatory, for in this case God does not demand, he only invites; but again, by so doing, we neglect grace. We can easily find a pretext for avoiding what gives us trouble, yet we end by injuring ourselves and losing light. The directors of those in this condition wonder that in spite of their piety and their desires for perfection they make no progress; it is because of their neglect of the graces given them. Jesus speaks to their hearts as he does to all, entreating their devotion and self-sacrifice; but they respond only with excuses.

2. *The guilt and folly of those who refuse to co-operate with divine grace.*

Christians who lack the courage to do violence to themselves frustrate the divine plans. It is as if they said to God: "I refuse to do your will. In calling me to a life of piety, in giving me more light and greater grace than others, you would make of me a perfect Christian; I wish to be only an ordinary one. You would have me be one of your consolers; well, I will not give you the consolations that your love deserves. You would include me amongst those who make repara-

tion for the sins of others, but I refuse to do penance for them, or even for my own faults. You desire me to be your intimate friend; I am content to be merely a servant. You must suffer loss through me, for I cannot bring myself to render you the glory which is your due. My own soul, too, will be the loser, and so will the souls of others, for I shall not accomplish the good which I might; but all this matters little in comparison with what I should suffer through your designs; for I should have to do violence to myself, to mortify my body and my tastes, to curb my mind, to watch over my words and to deny myself constantly; and I cannot bear all this; I prefer to live pleasantly. I should be called upon to embrace trials, contradictions, and humiliations. Well, I have not the courage; I prefer to give the rein to my natural inclinations rather than struggle to correspond to grace." We may not actually formulate these words, but if we neglect God's grace this is what our conduct and actions imply, and what insensate folly, to lose a heavenly and everlasting gain through dread of a moment's suffering!

Yes, and this folly and sin God always punishes, just as he invariably rewards fidelity. The premier reward for fidelity to grace is an increase of grace, just as the punishment for resistance to grace is the diminution thereof. St Paul, in speaking of pagans who had abandoned the true God and relapsed into idolatry, tells us, "God gave them up to the desires of their hearts" (Rom. i, 24). "God delivered them up to their reprobate senses." Alas! what degrading passions are to be found in the human soul! God has only partially to withdraw his grace or diminish his protection and the soul falls straightway into the abyss. Thus does he punish sin by allowing it to bring forth more sin, and reward virtue by an increase of virtue. Is not this, indeed, but the fulfilment of the desire alike of the sinner and of the just? The faithful desire to grow in the knowledge of God, to learn to serve and love him better; they crave, too, for self-knowledge that, by its light, they may humiliate and correct themselves, and so grow in virtue and in love. The faithless soul shuns the

light which would but illumine for her a path she does not wish to follow, and reveal to her faults she does not desire to recognize or correct. God then shows justice in granting to the faithful grace proportioned to their fidelity, and in withdrawing it from sinners, especially from the more obstinate among them. But his justice is tempered with mercy, for to these sinners he still accords help, though he is obliged to punish sin by allowing it to bring forth its fatal consequences.

If grace be neglected its efficiency decreases. This is true not only in the case of sinners who reject it entirely, but also proportionately in that of lukewarm souls who respond but imperfectly to its inspirations. In the case of the latter, they may be more or less obedient to God's voice, and so still receive certain graces; but these will not be so choice and abundant as God had intended, and they will have need of very powerful help if they are ever to return to the way of perfection; for every fault deliberately committed opens the way to fresh ones; every concession made to nature leads to a fresh concession. In the first place, such conduct diminishes that horror of sin and of wilful imperfection, which is at once a safeguard and a preservative. Then, too, every deliberate fault implies a false use of judgement, which warps the intelligence. The soul seeks to justify its conduct by false reasoning, and thus finds an increasing difficulty in judging wisely and seeing clearly. Above all, the will which has accepted the sin and has taken pleasure in it has thereby become attached to sin, and it will require a great effort to renounce it. When a train has been started in a wrong direction, the route cannot be altered without stopping the engine and bringing it back to the right line. A fresh impetus will be needed, and the train will have to put on extra speed, while if it had remained on the right road it would have been able to profit by the speed already acquired.

Even a single resistance to grace will cause some spiritual loss, but a long series of infidelities will form a habit of repelling divine inspirations, which may well prove fatal. Who, on reading the story of the ten

plagues of Egypt, is not amazed at the incomprehensible obstinacy of Pharaoh? "Who is Jehovah," says he at the outset, "that I should obey his voice? I know not the Lord, and I will not permit Israel to depart." Then Moses let loose upon Egypt the terrible plagues: the waters of the Nile were changed to blood, noxious animals, frogs and toads, mosquitoes and flies, were multiplied in the most frightful manner, hail destroyed the harvest, the farmers perished with their herds, and locusts devoured what the hail had spared; thick darkness followed; Pharaoh was alarmed, and at each fresh plague he promised amendment; but at its disappearance he again retracted all that he had promised. Only at the tenth plague, the death of his first-born son, did his obstinacy break down. Even so, a few days after having permitted Israel to depart, he changed his mind and set out in pursuit of the people. His heart must have been as hard as a rock, since such frightful events had not softened it. The truth was that this rebellious monarch had too often stifled the voice of conscience. The bow which has been forced to bend may again resume its shape, but our good or bad habits eventually form in each of us a fundamental and dominating disposition, which it will be hard to change and which will be found to reappear quickly after a passing repression or a momentary modification. The sinner will return to his sin, the lukewarm to their indifference, and the fervent souls to their habitual generosity.

How deplorable, then, are the consequences of the abuse of grace! It is from this resistance to the Holy Ghost that the ever-widening gulf between the perfect and the imperfect proceeds. Imperfections persisted in cease at last to disturb the soul, the intelligence loses its light, the will becomes less able to accomplish the acts of virtue before which it has recoiled, and divine inspirations become fewer and less importunate. Reaction is still possible; by dint of prayer and courageous effort lost ground may be regained, but this will not be easy. It is as if an architect had been given by his sovereign rich materials—beautiful stones, priceless marbles, and precious wood—for the building of a

splendid palace; but he allows the greater part of these to be lost, and so must content himself with the erection of a modest cottage. To imperfect souls in their day of judgement will appear as in a vision the multitude of the acts of laxity, egoism, sensuality, and impatience which they have committed and have forgotten, but of which God has kept account.

"To-day if you shall hear his voice, harden not your hearts" (Ps. xciv, 8). Let us then hearken to and obey this voice of the Lord, for so only shall we enter into his peace: *Introibunt in requiem meam.*

CHAPTER VIII

PERFECT CORRESPONDENCE TO GRACE

1. *The love of Jesus for the faithful soul.*

We have shown what a terrible loss is theirs who resist or neglect divine grace; it is now our happier task to set forth the blessedness of faithful souls. Precious, indeed, to the heart of Jesus are these souls. In what tender terms does he speak of them! "My sheep hear my voice; and I know them, and they follow me. I give unto them life everlasting, and they shall not perish for ever, and no man shall pluck them out of my hand" (John x, 27-28). These words show how his faithful sheep console Jesus for the ingratitude of the others. How he loves them, how he rejoices in their fidelity, how highly he values these souls whom his Father has entrusted to him, and whose happiness he rejoices in having secured for all eternity! "That which my Father has given to me is greater than all else, and no man shall pluck them out of the hand of my Father" (John x, 29). In the eyes of God faithful souls are of greater value than all the rest of creation, a treasure of treasures; and the more faithful they are the more does he delight in them.

What they do for him is nothing, however, in comparison with what he has done for them. When receiving even the greatest saints into his glorious kingdom, the Lord will say: "Well done, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful in little things, I will place you over the great things" (Matt. xxv, 21). Yet he appreciates this fidelity whether shown in matters small or great; it ravishes his heart, even as infidelity saddens it. Has he not said: "He that is faithful in that which is least, is faithful also in that which is greater; and he that is unjust in that which is little, is unjust also in that which is great" (Luke xvi, 10).

Why does this man make it his aim to please God in everything, and endeavour to perform even the smallest action perfectly? It is because he is for ever listening to the divine voice in the depth of his soul, which bids him renounce self and sacrifice all in order to do the will of God. *Vocem meam audient* ("My sheep hear my voice"). Then, when some great matter is at stake the love of this good servant will teach him to submit to the voice of God, desiring only to please him. And why are these others unfaithful in many little things? It is because their love is weak; they are influenced by self-love and not by love of God, so they turn a deaf ear to the inspirations of grace, and instead obey those of nature. Tepid and lax in small things, they will hardly prove faithful in the day of great temptation.

The heart of Jesus rejoices over a truly submissive soul, for he knows well all the blessings he can bestow upon such a one, and he delights to invest it with inestimable riches. Nothing is impossible to the gentle Saviour; of the most inveterate sinner he can make a saint. St Paul, writing to Titus, his disciple, whom he had made bishop of Crete, drew this sad portrait of the Cretans: "The Cretans are liars, evil beasts, slothful bellies" Titus i, 12), yet into the heart of this degenerate race Titus was called to inculcate all virtue (*ibid.* ch. ii). The apostle knew well from personal experience that nothing can withstand the grace of God, that it works miracles. Sins of the past are no obstacles; when they have been regretted and atoned for they even become the occasions for more generous acts of virtue. The repentant sinner who humiliates himself and does penance wins many more graces than he who may have sinned less but who knows neither how to humiliate himself, nor to make generous sacrifices. However greatly a man may have sinned in the past, the greater the generosity he now shows, the more perfect will be his love and obedience, and to these is ever accorded a superabundance of grace.

2. *Examples of fidelity.*

There are many examples of sinners who have become great saints. Peter sinned greatly when he denied his Master, adding even oaths and contemptuous words to his cowardly falsehood: "I know not the man." Yet this sin led him to perform the tenderest acts of love. Pope St Clement, who was his contemporary, tells us that each morning when the cock began to crow he would pray and weep over his fall until the tears traced furrows down his cheeks. St Augustine, St Camillus of Lellis, St Mary Magdalen, St Margaret of Cortona, and many others, have raised themselves from the depths of vice to the summits of love. It is good for us to witness these sublime victories of grace. Nothing is more consoling, for nothing illustrates more clearly the power of perfect obedience to raise the soul. "But we all, beholding the glory of the Lord with open face, are transformed into the same image from glory to glory, as by the Spirit of the Lord," says St Paul (2 Cor. iii, 18). The Spirit of the Lord acts progressively; he gives first a glimmering of truth, and asks in return for small acts of virtue. Fidelity to these first inspirations strengthens us to receive greater light and a more powerful impetus. Grace then becomes not only more and more exacting, but also more powerful. He who is faithful will penetrate ever more deeply into the knowledge of divine truth, and his power for good will continually increase; the pious soul is much more enlightened than the simple Christian; the fervent soul than the merely pious; the perfect soul is more so than the fervent, and the heroic than the perfect.

Nicodemus was astonished at the miracles of Jesus. While his colleagues of the Sanhedrin rebelled from the first against the light, he allowed himself to be touched by grace, but he was so timid that he sought his first interview with the Master in secret. It is evident how this timidity impressed St John, for each time he speaks of Nicodemus he relates how he had come by night to find Jesus (iii, 2; vii, 50; xix, 39). Jesus, however, showed compassion on this upright, though timid, soul.

Two and a half years later the work of grace bore fruit, and true courage shone forth in him. When the other members of the Sanhedrin were giving vent to their rage against the Saviour, he dauntlessly cried: "Doth our law judge any man unless it first hear him and know what he doeth?" However, he did not yet dare to declare himself a follower of Jesus, for when the others said, "Art thou also a Galilean?" (John vii, 52) he would not affirm it. But six months later, when our Lord was condemned and crucified and his cause seemed lost for ever, Nicodemus openly came forward as his disciple.

St Paul had long resisted grace. When he commended the death of Stephen, approved the condemnation of the other martyrs, and, thirsting for the blood of the disciples of the Lord, set out for Damascus to play the role of persecutor, he had already undoubtedly received graces which he had disregarded. Even if, misled by his Pharisaical zeal for the law of Moses, he did not realise the abomination of his conduct, yet he could not but know that these sanguinary proceedings were displeasing to God. He himself testifies to his own culpability and its excuse: "I was formerly a blasphemer, a persecutor and contumelious. But I obtained the mercy of God, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief" (1 Tim. i, 13). Thrown to the earth on the road to Damascus, by the grace of God, henceforth he is entirely obedient: "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" The Lord at first requires of him nothing but a humble docility: "Arise and go into the city; there it shall be told thee what thou must do." Filled with contrition, Paul passes three days in prayer, neither eating nor drinking. In order to prove him the Lord permits him at first to remain in this darkness; then he sends Ananias to him. Scarcely has Paul been instructed by this servant of God than his zeal bursts forth. The persecutor of yesterday tramples under foot all self-interest, and going into the synagogue declares that Jesus is indeed the Messiah, the Son of God. However, he was not yet ready for his sublime mission. The other apostles had had three years of novitiate in the school of Jesus, and

St Paul must also spend three years in solitude, giving himself up to recollection and prayer, to ensure the formation of his interior life. "There God revealed his Son unto him" (Gal. i, 16). Subsequently, for four or five years he was initiated in evangelization, defending the cause of Jesus, and gaining disciples for him. It was not until seven or eight years after his conversion that by the command of the Holy Spirit he was raised to the episcopate, and started out on his extended missions. Now is fulfilled the word of God to Ananias: "I will show him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake" (Acts ix, 16). His incessant labours, his privations, his trials, his prayers, and his virtues all combined to raise him to the very summit of sanctity, and St Paul himself thus sums up his life of continual ascension, "By the grace of God I am what I am, but his grace in me has not been void" (1 Cor. xv, 10).

3. *The guerdon of upright and courageous souls.*

What wonders does divine grace work in a docile heart! The infinitely good and holy God desires above all things to impart his blessings to his children and to make them partakers in his holiness and happiness. His paternal eye is ever upon them, awaiting their good-will and, as it were, imploring their consent that he may impart to them his riches. His wisdom, too, knows well the paths they must tread to attain to this holiness and happiness. How great, then, is the gain of those who at all times and under all circumstances abandon themselves to the guidance of a director so wise and so loving. In them the flood of grace will continually increase; at first it was like an intermittent dew, then it became a rivulet, a stream, and at last a rapid current, pure and strong.

Let us, then, follow the Lord as valiant soldiers their captain; as children who, in simplicity and sincerity, obey the counsels of their parents.

Courage and integrity are the qualities most needed for constant fidelity to grace, and cowardice is the chief cause of unfaithfulness. The wise and holy God who

is our guide, leads us ever along the rugged way of renunciation and self-sacrifice, and ungenerous hearts often refuse to follow him.

Sincerity is not less essential. *Quam bonus Israel Deus, his qui recto sunt corde* ("How good is God to his people, to the upright of heart!") Zaccheus was a sinner; for love of gain he had embraced an infamous trade, and had enriched himself by many acts of injustice, but he still retained a measure of frankness and uprightness. Jesus charmed him; he was seized with love for one so lovable, and thus inspired, he acknowledged his errors, offered abundant reparation, and became a fervent disciple of the good Master; he even developed later into a saint.

The upright of heart, forgetting self, will seek God alone; they will apply themselves to the acquisition of virtue, not only through love of its excellence, nor for the satisfaction or glory it may yield, but in order to please God.[1] They will be sincere not only with their neighbours, but with themselves. How numerous, alas, are they who seek at the same time to serve God and to satisfy nature, and who end by persuading themselves that their actions are justified. If the truly upright of soul are tempted to seek what pleases their senses, flatters their self-love, and gratifies their indolence, they do not thereupon have recourse to false reasoning or try to convince themselves that they will only what God wills; instead, they avow their faults, they pray, and they struggle; defeated, they rise again and return to the fight, and God comes at length to their rescue. If they be then courageous and zealous they will soon become more obedient to grace, and will in the end wing their flight to the regions of pure love.

[1] A celebrated Visitandine, Mère Boulier, who died in the odour of sanctity, and was greatly esteemed by St Margaret Mary, wrote: "That which constitutes the great charm in the eyes of the bride, which the bridegroom extols, is the direct and simple gaze, void of self-consciousness, which regards him with a look so penetrating in its simplicity and so effective in its integrity that the bridegroom is forced to avow that it wounds his heart, whence flow into the heart of the bride torrents of graces and blessings." (*Vie de la Mère Boulier, Avis*, IIIme partie, No. xxv.)

"Love Jesus much," said a celestial voice to Gemma Galgani, "oppose him in nothing, and you will see how far, in how short a time, he will help you to go."

A saintly Carmelite, specially favoured by God, Sister Mary of Jesus Crucified, said once whilst in ecstasy: "One soul may gain more in a month than another in fifty years of religious life." When asked which were the souls so specially meritorious and dear to God, she replied: "Those who are pure of heart and humble in spirit." Speaking to such, she said: "You will be amazed one day to know of all the souls you have saved."

Those who are sincere, valiant, and faithful are rewarded even here below for their fidelity; sacrifices constantly repeated will at length become easy to them; virtue will become a necessity, love a sweet practice, and their meritorious actions will multiply themselves unconsciously. And what sweet surprises await such as these in the world to come! There they will see with open eyes the wisdom and mercy with which God has led them, the merits he has helped them to gain, the good which through them he has worked in the souls of others, and the unimaginable treasures of love, glory, and felicity which he has reserved for them.

CHAPTER IX

THE WAYS OF GRACE

1. *The initial action of grace through the reason and the senses.*

One of the sweetest joys of heaven will be the contemplation of the dealings of our Lord with his elect; of the powerful influence with which he has guided each soul in the path of virtue; and of how this influence, to which we owe every good desire and every supernatural act, was nevertheless so gentle as to leave our liberty intact and our merit complete. "Wisdom reacheth therefore from end to end mightily, and ordereth all things sweetly" (Wisdom viii, 1). "For it is God who worketh in you, both to will and to accomplish" (Phil. ii, 13). Every thought of good, every movement of the will, comes from him.

To this end God first makes use of exterior things—sermons, books, wise counsels, good examples, the happy or sad events of life. These in themselves are not grace, but means of grace; for while God thus influences us exteriorly he works also in the depths of our souls, enlightening our minds and giving us helpful inspirations. He touches the will, and gives it a holy inclination towards virtue which encourages but does not force it, for the will retains the power of choosing between good and evil, of accepting or refusing the divine inspiration.

In his dealings with souls the Lord employs different means, suited to the needs of each: to the shepherds he sent angels; for the Magi, who were astronomers, he caused a star to shine; to the scribes and doctors Jesus quoted the prophecies; he won the hearts of the sick by curing them, and the imagination of the multitude by working miracles; to the children he taught the obedience due to their parents and masters, and he drew

philosophers and wise men to him by the sublimity of his doctrines.

Some are touched and encouraged to serve God with greater piety by the sight of the goodness and zeal of his priests; others by the devotion of religious souls; others again by the good example and solid virtue of sincere Christians.

Grace can act but feebly and intermittently on a soul inexperienced in the ways of love. Such a one, wholly taken up with the cares of life or the pursuit of pleasure, rarely gives heed to the voice of God. The devout, on the other hand, who devote themselves constantly to pious exercises and to spiritual reading, will be rewarded by hearing clearly the voice of the Lord speaking directly to their heart, and his grace will enlighten them and will inspire them to many acts of virtue and of love.

But even in these there remain many defects which may deaden their ears to the voice of God. The Lord will then enlighten them through their reading, their meditations, and the exhortations they hear. By these means he touches and importunes them, inspires them with good resolutions, and encourages them to watchfulness and continual effort. In such people the lower self is still powerful, for the human feelings have not been subdued, and they often gain ascendancy over the intelligence and the will. In order, then, to help and strengthen such weak souls, grace acts upon their lower faculties, upon the imagination and emotions, and through them it reaches the mind and the will. Grace could doubtless incite the soul to perfection simply by the appeal of faith to the mind, but that would be less potent. Those who have already shown generosity God will aid more effectually by touching their hearts.

This action of grace on the lower faculties is especially noticeable in the young. Youth is impressionable, generous, and ardent; the future charms and captivates it. Enthusiasm readily takes possession of the young and gives them a vigorous start. The faults of youth are more impetuous and less deliberate than those of older people, and the soundest reasoning is powerless to subdue them; but to the seductions of evil, the divine

grace opposes the power of a holy enthusiasm for good; to the fury of the passions, the strength of divine love. It causes noble ideals to shine before the soul, for the attainment of which acts of courage and energy are necessary, and thus it incites to the generous practice of the virtues which are most necessary. If a soul thus provided with spiritual help still hesitates to renounce self, it is a sure evidence of resistance to grace.

The fiery ardour of youth should be moderated by prudence and regulated by obedience, but it should not be extinguished; the young should be directed, not paralysed. Renunciation is difficult to human nature, and if a soul at the beginning of spiritual life does not launch out with ardour and holy enthusiasm, or if imprudent directors, themselves deficient in generosity, thwart this work of grace, it is to be feared that it will never attain to the degree of love to which God has called it. Rarely has anyone who in youth was deficient in zeal for sacrifice, shown himself in later life valiant and energetic in the accomplishment of duty.

The predominance of the lower faculties which is noticeable at the beginning of the spiritual life, is an obstacle to perfection. Superficial observers, seeing young souls filled with ardour and generosity, are often led to believe them further advanced than they really are. Virtue is deep and solid only when it has been severely tested, when the first fervour of the emotions has been succeeded by the calm and steady resolution of the will. It is grace which gives to the generous servants of God that constancy to duty, that self-mastery and steadfast equanimity of soul which are the marks of perfect love.

2. *The direct action of the Holy Spirit in the higher regions of the soul.*

That faithful souls may be enabled to attain to this delectable estate of fortitude, constancy, and self-mastery, grace modifies in them its original workings. After the period of sensible fervour, when virtue has become more solid, the understanding more enlightened,

and the will strengthened, God's grace,—his luminous and powerful word, sharper, says St Paul, than a two-edged sword,—pierces even to the depths where are united the two parts of the human soul—the inferior and carnal, and the superior and spiritual—and effects their separation. "The word of God is living and effectual, and more piercing than any two-edged sword, and reaching unto the division of the soul and the spirit" (Heb. iv, 12). But it is essential that the soul yield itself to this work of grace, detach itself from the things of sense, and accept lovingly what is dry and distasteful. The mind must be mortified and the will strengthened by the practice of virtues which have suddenly become more difficult. Slow and laborious work! Only very generous and faithful hearts will succeed in its accomplishment; the greater number of the servants of God correspond with but semi-fidelity to these purifying and fortifying graces. Such as these gain some merit, and perform many acts of virtue, but they do not surrender themselves completely to God and so do not receive in return the continual and precious impetus of the Holy Spirit.

For the Holy Spirit, who has never ceased to pursue them with his graces, desires now to take entire possession of their hearts. He would become their perpetual and sweet inspiration. Even to beginners he will sometimes extend his most precious gifts, but only in exceptional cases, for this is not generally suited to those in whom the dominion of the inferior faculties is still strong. The exercise of the gifts of the Holy Ghost becomes more frequent at times of sensible fervour, because generous souls, having sincerely renounced their faults, are more pliable in the divine hand; but the action of the Holy Ghost is not exercised with entire freedom until the imagination, the feelings, and the reasoning powers are passive. Heretofore, the soul has made use of these powers to help her towards perfection, but even in ardent souls they often, later on, form obstacles to the free exercise of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, and still more so in ungenerous ones. When, however, the higher attributes of the intellect and the will have been

set free from the inferior faculties and enabled to act independently, and when the gifts of the Holy Spirit are accorded untrammelled action, his light, love, and sanctity will work miracles in this the most sublime region of the human soul.

We then behold the triumph of grace. Up to this point the Lord has treated man as a servant to whom orders are given, but now as a child whose father holds him by the hand, guides him, carries him even in his arms. "Whosoever are led by the spirit of God, they are the sons of God" (Rom. viii, 14).

The soul that possesses the gifts of the Holy Ghost without employing them resembles a craft with the sails closely furled, and impelled only by oars. Let the sails be spread, and the wind will drive the boat along quickly and smoothly.

The influence of the gifts of the Holy Ghost is not sufficiently recognized. He who does not take them into account will never understand the soul of a saint. It would be a gross error to imagine that we can attain to sanctity or even to ordinary perfection by means of ordinary grace, by good conduct, meditations, and self-examinations. We must have, in addition, the powerful and habitual action of the gifts of the Holy Ghost. No one denies that the martyrs were endued with a strength superhuman and divine. St Felicitas, when giving birth to a child in prison, uttered cries of pain. "If you complain now," said the gaoler, "what will you do when you are torn by the beasts?" "Now I suffer alone," replied the saint, "then another will be with me, who will suffer for me because I shall be suffering for him." And a few days later she did, indeed, endure martyrdom heroically.

These generous confessors were visibly sustained in their frightful torments by the spirit of God; they possessed not only ordinary fortitude, but the superhuman courage which is the gift of the Holy Ghost. Not less, but more courage is required for the practice, not for a day, but for years, of that perfect love, which implies entire renouncement and complete surrender of our self-will to the divine.

St Francis de Sales points out clearly that the gifts of the Holy Ghost are akin to perfect love. "They are not only inseparable from charity," he says, "but they have the principal qualities of charity." They are at once the effect and the cause of love; they spring from it, and they nourish and increase it. "Wisdom," says the holy doctor again, "is nothing but love which tastes, enjoys, and experiences the sweetness of God."

The faithful find a profound and sweet satisfaction in loving God, and as they grow in comprehension of the divine loveliness, so do they grow in love. Understanding is, "love which is occupied in meditating on the beauty of the truths of faith, in order to learn to know God." The Holy Spirit communicates great lights to those thus eagerly occupied with God; he reveals to them his greatness and his goodness, that they may love him more ardently; and they thus become so enamoured of God that all else appears trifling in comparison with him. The Holy Spirit detaches them from all creatures by revealing to them their own nothingness and that of all created beings, and he thus confirms them in love. "Counsel is also love, in that it makes us careful and skilful in the choice of fit means of serving God perfectly:" thanks to this gift, souls possessed of divine love know far better than any others how to serve the Beloved; intuition tells them what will rejoice his heart. "Fortitude is love which surmounts all obstacles and achieves the most difficult undertakings:" the Holy Ghost would not fill a soul with perfect love without giving it also a corresponding strength, which will inspire generous sacrifices, holy endurance, and constancy in the practice of virtue. "Piety is the love which lightens labour, and enables us to apply ourselves heartily, happily, and with filial affection to the works which are pleasing to God our Father:" the Holy Ghost inspires souls that abandon themselves unreservedly to him with sentiments not of fear, but of filial love, so that, with a lively and whole-hearted confidence, they proclaim how kind a father is their God, "To whom we cry, Abba, Father." The gift of the fear of the Lord is also an effect of infused love. It desires

that everything be done in the best possible manner for God, and it dreads imperfection; therefore, this gift renders the soul vigilant and prudent.

The influence of the gifts of the Holy Ghost explains the frequently observed phenomenon of simple and illiterate, but faithful people showing more enlightenment than persons who are learned but ungenerous. Lay brothers, like St Alphonsus Rodriguez, and other simple religious, have proved in this respect superior to theologians who were savants indeed, but also narrow-minded. These faithful ones have a clearer comprehension of the greatness of God, of how good and how worthy of love he is, and of the worthlessness of creatures. They realize the delicacy and generosity which are the meed of divine love. They ardently desire to love God ever more and more, and to devote themselves to the extension of his kingdom; and to this end they contribute by prayers, works, and sacrifices. They are also gifted with great courage, stability, and perseverance, but these qualities have not been acquired by their own efforts, although they have prepared the way for the reception of the still greater graces bestowed upon them by the spirit of God. These gifts of the Holy Ghost will uplift the soul at last to the state which St Francis de Sales calls: "The ecstasy of action and of life; . . . in addition to the divine commandments, there are heavenly inspirations for the execution of which God must raise us above ourselves, and set us free from the inclinations and instincts of our nature; the more so that although these inspirations are not contrary to human reason, they nevertheless surpass and go beyond it, so that we then live not only an ordinary honest Christian life, but one that is supernatural, spiritual, devout, and ecstatic, a life above and beyond our natural condition" (*Love of God*, vi, 6).

St Paul, returning from Macedonia to Palestine, found, in all the towns through which he passed, prophets who warned him that tribulations and captivity awaited him at Jerusalem. The faithful begged him to change his plans and not return to the Holy City, but the Apostle only replied: "And now, behold, being

bound in the spirit, I go to Jerusalem" (Acts xx, 22, 23). He was as though chained by the divine spirit, whose inspiration he would never resist.

Jesus himself was constantly under the direction of the Holy Spirit. God had announced through his prophet: "And the spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the spirit of counsel and of fortitude, the spirit of knowledge and of godliness, and he shall be filled with the spirit of the fear of the Lord" (Isa. xi, 2). And again the prophet says: "The spirit of the Lord is upon me" (Isa. lxi, 1). Jesus claimed these words as applying to himself. At the beginning of his public life, the evangelists tell us: "He was led by the spirit into the wilderness," there to suffer all the rigours of fasting in solitude (Matt. iv, 1; Mark i, 12; Luke iv, 1). By the spirit he was sent to carry good tidings to the poor and heal the sick at heart (Luke iv, 18). Through the spirit he drove out demons, and gave commandments to the apostles (Acts i, 2). By the same spirit he was led up to Jerusalem to be crucified, and "offered himself unspotted unto God" (Heb. ix, 14). "I do nothing of myself," he said (John vii, 28), "but the Father who abideth in me, he doeth the works" (John xiv, 10), and it was by the Holy Spirit that the Father accomplished these divine works.

The same may be said of all souls who completely renounce their own will and place themselves unreservedly in the hands of God. They then enter fully upon the unitive way, and are under the continual direction of the Holy Spirit. Many struggles and trials still await them; they must still do violence to themselves; but they see clearly the necessity for such acts of virtue, and appreciate their benefit. The imagination, the feelings, and the reason are not inactive in such souls, but they have subjected all these attributes to the control of him who holds the sceptre, and to whose dominion they have surrendered their whole being,—the Holy Spirit. His light and love maintain them in union with God, and through his inspiration they are able to perform acts of exceeding virtue. "Being freed from sin, we have

been made servants of justice" (Rom. vi, 18). Freed from sin, they have become the willing and happy slaves of the spirit of love.

And this slavery is perfect liberty, for "Where the spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty" (2 Cor. iii, 17), liberty of mind, liberty of heart. Liberty is a product of the mind; a being without intelligence knows nothing of liberty; the more light we have, the freer we are. Error enslaves the mind and leads it astray; enlightened by the Holy Spirit, it is delivered from error and embraces truth with delight. The heart is reduced to servitude by the passions; the man who yields to his evil inclinations is thereby made ashamed; he does not wish to tarnish his soul or to debase himself, he would prefer to practise virtue, but, dominated by his bad habits, he lacks the necessary courage, and thus becomes a slave.

The generous soul, on the contrary, burning with the desire to serve God perfectly, gains absolute freedom to follow its desires when it gives itself to the embrace of the spirit of love; for the divine spirit will only take possession of those who desire to receive him, who invoke him, and by their generosity prepare themselves for his presence. He who travels in an automobile, especially if he has acquired his car at the cost of hard labour, is as free and as deserving as the one who travels on foot; he also goes farther, with greater speed and with more ease and comfort. So also the soul united to God, and directed by the Holy Spirit, will make swifter and happier progress and will penetrate much farther into the regions of pure love.

CHAPTER X

HOW WE SHOULD ATONE FOR UNFAITHFULNESS

1. *Our power to frustrate the designs of God.*

Every soul who has attained to fervour should regard itself as one of the privileged of the Lord, for the graces which have endued it therewith have been powerful and innumerable. Compared with those given to the generality of Christians, they are as a drop of water to a torrent. Exhortations, good example, reading, prayers, frequent communions, spiritual lights and inspirations,—nothing has been wanting. Not through their own merits are souls thus favoured, but by God's goodness. In thus, however, giving greater means of sanctification to some souls than to others, God does not swerve from the great law which he has laid down for all. He desires that every man enjoy incomparable happiness for ever. Such happiness is doubtless a gift, but it will also be the well-earned reward of courage and constancy. Is it not, then, fitting that God should reward only those who have shown themselves worthy, that he should save those who desire to be saved, and sanctify those who have willed to be holy?

Many even of the elect in heaven will not be qualified to enjoy the degree of glory and happiness that was destined for them. In our Lord's beautiful parable of the talents, the servants say to their master: "Lord, you delivered to me five talents; behold five others which I have gained: . . . Lord, you delivered to me two talents; behold two others which I have gained." Thus will speak all good servants who have corresponded with the designs of God and profited by his graces. But there will be many others less faithful, who will have to confess: "Lord, you entrusted to me five talents; instead of gaining five others, as you expected, I can only offer you one, two, or three."

Even for these there will be in heaven no regret or sorrow; this would be incompatible with the possession of the infinite good, which will crown the aspirations of all hearts; indeed, in their adoration of the will of God, the elect accept all his judgements with joy, humility, and gratitude. Those, however, who have been entirely faithful will enjoy a greater rapture, that of being able to declare: "My God, I offer you all the glory which you designed me to win for you. I have earned for the soul of my Saviour, for the most holy Virgin, for my protectors and heavenly friends, all the joy that I was capable of procuring; I have saved from hell all the souls you desired me to save." What unspeakable felicity will be the lot of such faithful ones! How trifling will then appear their sacrifices, how short the trials which have gained this never-ending joy!

2. *The purgatory of unfaithful souls.*

But if regret is impossible in heaven, one cannot say the same of purgatory. In this place of expiation, where each suffers according to his sins, the abuse of grace is severely punished. "By what things a man sinneth, by the same also is he tormented" (Wisdom xi, 17). What sorrow, then, is here the portion of the guilty in realizing their immense losses! They see now how gross has been their ingratitude, how insensate their resistance to a God who merited only obedience and love, and the more they learn of the loveliness of God, the more poignant is their regret. They perceive that a whole life of sacrifice is but a small price to pay for the least of the glories of heaven, for the love and the everlasting possession of God; and that by their own fault they have forfeited innumerable merits. Oh, if they could but live their lives again; how ardent they then would be, how courageous, how they would multiply their efforts, their sacrifices and their penances! Combined with a sense of their own loss there is, for priestly souls in purgatory, the sorrowful knowledge that they could have saved many others had they not failed in their duty. St Margaret Mary tells us how she once saw in a vision

a religious long dead, who said that she suffered much in purgatory, but the worst of her griefs was to know that one of her relatives had been condemned to hell. If this religious had been more generous during her lifetime she might have obtained for this relative the grace of conversion; and it was probably for her failure in this respect that she had to submit to such a torturing ordeal. How terrible must be the pain of damnation for those who are consumed not only with sorrow for their own loss, but also with intense regret for their share in the loss of the souls of others. The pains of purgatory have no alleviation. On earth the sufferings of the soul are often dulled by those of the body to which it is bound. Other occupations and cares also distract it, and it is rarely deprived of all consolation. But in purgatory its sufferings will have no such mitigation. Oh, how futile will then appear the guilty pleasures it refused to renounce! How trifling the sacrifices it refused to make! How it will deplore its cowardice, its selfishness, and its folly! The pain of the thought of this everlasting loss is more torturing than any flames.

3. *We should pray for grace to expiate our sins.*

Save that of losing one's soul, there is no greater calamity than the abuse of divine grace. Is it possible, we may ask, to atone for such a disaster? A prayer used in certain communities, and commended by the Venerable Father Baudouin to his religious, makes this triple petition: "My God, help me by thy mercy before I die to regain all the grace which by my folly I have forfeited; grant me yet to attain to the height of perfection to which thou wouldst lead me; and repair for me, also, I beseech thee, the harm I have done to the souls of others."[1] Such a prayer is entirely legitimate, for God both can and will give to faithful souls sufficient grace to repair all their former losses. He will send trials and sacrifices to take the place of those they have refused; he will give more light, greater strength, and

[1] Father Lallemant also teaches us that we should frequently offer these three petitions to God. (*Fourth Princ.*, ch. xi, art. 1, par. 7).

purer love. This is neither beyond the power of God nor contrary to his justice, for he has promised all things to prayer. It is thus that great sinners have become great saints. Their sins have become occasions of greater virtue; the desire to repair their past faults has inspired in them greater austerity and love. The tears of Peter, which, according to St Clement, lasted as long as he lived, flowed through the love he felt for the Master he had denied. Our Lord told St Margaret of Cortona that her penances had so entirely effaced her nine years of profligacy that in heaven he would place her amongst the virgins. These examples and many others show us that we should never be discouraged by our faults; yet we must not be content with deploring them, but must endeavour to expiate them.

For it is only by expiation that we can gain the grace which God has destined for us. Two things are necessary to repentance: the return of the will to God in true sorrow for the fault committed, and reparation for the injury done to God, whose honour has been wounded by the sin.

Those who are content merely to regret their faults may obtain pardon for them, but they will have to suffer from their effects. God can no longer lavish his graces upon them, and the soul weakened by sin will decline still farther from perfection. If in a moment of anger with one of my friends I go to ravage his house, it will not suffice for me afterwards to express repentance; I must also repair the damage I have done. To postpone the accomplishment of this duty would be a sign of a very lukewarm affection for my friend, and I could not expect to be restored to his good graces.

The delight that a God of infinite holiness takes in the soul, and the graces with which he endows it, are according to the measure of its purity. Unatoned faults leave a stain upon the soul, and render it less pleasing to God. Those who are content to repudiate their faults without trying to repair them are as chimney-sweepers, who pass a few drops of water over their face and hands to remove the worst of the soot, but are unwilling to have recourse to soap in order to become really clean.

Finally, all faults, except those of pure frailty, cause a diminution of light in the soul and a weakening of the will. Repudiation of a fault will assist the intellect to recover its light, and the will its attraction for virtue; but only by generous acts which counteract the effects of sin can the soul be restored to its first vigour.

Expiation propitiates God; it wins from him many powerful graces and removes from the soul the obstacles raised there by sin, which prevented the perfect exercise of virtue. Not only does it repair former faults, it raises the soul to higher virtues than before, and thus verifies the fearless expression of St Augustine and the beautiful words of St Paul: "To them that love God, all things work together unto good" (Rom. viii, 28).

But if we do not whole-heartedly accept the opportunities which God offers us to repair our losses of grace, he will pass us by, bestowing them on more faithful souls. "Take from him the pound, and give it to him that hath ten," says the king in the parable of the pounds; and when the servants object that he already has the better portion, the king maintains his verdict, voicing the sentiment so often repeated by the Saviour: "To every one that hath shall be given, and he shall abound; but from him that hath not, even that which he hath, shall be taken" (Luke xix, 26; Matt. xiii, 12; xxv, 9). Fidelity to graces received attracts ever greater graces, and this accounts for the immense treasures of the saints.

4. *To those who are courageous in expiation God will restore lost graces.*

How consoling is the thought that even the unfaithful can by their generosity recover that which has been lost. Distrustful hearts imagine it impossible to regain the degree of fervour from which they have fallen, but this shows a poor comprehension of divine forbearance and mercy. Let us read the words of the prophets who sing of this infinite mercy, never forgetting that they were addressed to a people who perpetually relapsed into sin, and who, more than most, had abused divine favours.

To cite only a few: "If the wicked do penance for all his sins which he hath committed and keep all my commandments, and do judgement and justice, living he shall live, and shall not die. I will not remember all his iniquities which he hath done; in his justice which he hath wrought, he shall live" (Ezek. xviii, 21-22). "And if I shall say to the wicked: Thou shalt surely die: and he do penance for his sin, and do judgement and justice, and if that wicked man restore the pledge, and render what he had robbed, and walk in the commandment of life, and do no unjust thing: he shall surely live and shall not die. None of his sins which he hath committed shall be imputed to him" (*ibid*, xxxiii, 14-16). "Return, O Israel, to the Lord thy God: for thou hast fallen down by thy iniquity. . . . I will heal their breaches, I will love them freely: for my wrath is turned away from them. I will be as the dew, Israel shall spring as the lily, and his root shall shoot forth as that of Libanus" (Osee xiv, 2-6). "Now therefore saith the Lord: Be converted to me with all your heart, in fasting, and in weeping, and in mourning. Rend your hearts, and not your garments, and turn to the Lord your God: for he is gracious and merciful, patient and rich in mercy, and ready to repent of the evil" (Joel ii, 11-12). "Wash yourselves, be clean, take away the evil of your devices from my eyes; cease to do perversely, learn to do well. Seek judgement, relieve the oppressed. Judge for the fatherless, defend the widow . . . though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow: and if they be red as crimson, they shall be white as wool" (Isa. i, 16-18). "O Israel, forget me not. I have blotted out thy iniquities as a cloud, and thy sins as a mist: return to me, for I have redeemed thee" (*ibid*, xliv, 22). "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unjust man his thoughts, and let him return to the Lord, and he will have mercy on him, and to our God: for he is bountiful to forgive. For my thoughts are not your thoughts, nor your ways my ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are exalted above the earth, so are my ways exalted above your ways and my thoughts above your thoughts" (*ibid*,

lv, 7-9). Behold here the mercy of God which fills the universe,—*misericordia Domini plena est terra*,—and surpasses the understanding of the feeble intelligence of man!

Even those who have most abused this mercy may still hope, for the measure of it which they have already received shows them to have been favourites of God, and it rests only with themselves to become so again. "For the gifts and the calling of God are without repentance," teaches St Paul (Rom. xi, 29). God's desires may, indeed, be hindered by man, but they are never defeated; the obstacles to them will be removed, and the original plans of Providence accomplished. St Paul teaches us this consoling truth when speaking of the Jews. They spurned the Gospel: so God had to treat them as enemies of his Son, and give to the Gentiles the riches which they had refused. But their infidelity has thus enriched the world, and they still remain the chosen people, dearly loved by God, through whose conversion the world will one day obtain great treasures of grace. Even those who have enjoyed the gifts of God, his called and chosen whom he has favoured with mystical graces, may by their infidelity lose these precious favours. But God is ever disposed to shower greater graces upon these privileged ones if they will but generously expiate their faults.

As eternal happiness will consist in the love and the possession of God, let us aim at acquiring this happiness in the highest degree possible. However great may have hitherto been our infidelities, let us confidently believe that with the help of God we can repair them, and regain what we have lost; only we must remember that to obtain such a result we must be generous in every trial.

God calls you, faithful soul, to high virtue. This is indeed difficult to acquire, but never say the task is too arduous or above your strength. Only cowards thus excuse themselves. Perish the thought that we should be found idlers or cowards! "Take courage and be strong" (Jos. i, 6); let these words be our motto; they are the charge which God gave to Josue, which David

in dying made to Solomon (3 Kings ii, 2), which the angel made to Daniel (Dan. x, 19), "Take courage and be strong." Let us besiege the throne of God with incessant prayer, and do violence to ourselves by continual renunciation. Prayer will obtain for us an abundance of graces; courage will enable us to correspond with them, and the will of God will then be accomplished in us. *Haec est voluntas Dei, sanctificatio vestra* ("For this is the will of God, your sanctification") (1 Thess. iv, 3).

CHAPTER XI

NEVER TO COUNT THE COST

1. *There is no victory without combat.*

"To him that overcometh I will give to eat of the tree of life which is in the paradise of my God" (Apoc. ii, 7). "To him that overcometh I will give the hidden manna . . . and a new name written, which no man knoweth but he that receiveth it" (ii, 17).[1] "And he that shall overcome and keep my works unto the end, I will give him power over the nations" (ii, 26). "He that shall overcome shall be clothed in white garments . . . and I will confess his name before my Father and before his angels" (iii, 5). "He that shall overcome, I will make him a pillar in the temple of my God" (iii, 12). "To him that shall overcome, I will give to sit with me in my throne" (iii, 21). "To him that thirsteth, I will give of the fountain of the water of life, freely" (xxi, 6). "He that shall overcome shall possess these things. And I will be his God: and he shall be my son" (xxi, 7). "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard: neither hath it entered into the heart of man, what things God hath prepared for them that love him" (1 Cor. ii, 9). Emphatically, however, does Jesus declare to his beloved apostle, that these things will be the portion only of those who are "not overcome by evil, but overcome evil by good" (Rom. xii, 21). It is those who win the victory who alone prove their love for our Lord. "Fight the good fight of faith; lay hold on eternal life, whereunto thou art called" (1 Tim. vi, 12), says St Paul to his disciple. Eternal life, then, implies a conquest! Jesus, the great Conqueror, desires that his court be composed of brave souls who, like himself, have con-

[1] It would appear that in the heavenly tongue,—the language of the elect,—a name alone will suffice to express all the virtues and works of each.

quered Paradise. In the vision of the Apocalypse, St John sees all the elect with palms of victory in their hands (Apoc. vii, 9). In heaven all will be conquerors, even those who were converted at the last hour after a life of sin. Small was the victory of such, and small will be their triumph in eternity; but they, too, have had to renounce sin and tear themselves free from the bonds of Satan; far more glorious, however, will be the victories of loving souls, who with each triumph win an increase of love and purity.

2. *The struggle with demons.*

It is God's will that our celestial glory and joy should be the fruit of our victories. Therefore his enemies are ours, and wage against us an incessant and implacable warfare. "For our wrestling is not against flesh and blood: but against . . . the rulers of the world of this darkness, against the spirits of wickedness in the high places" (Eph. vi, 12). When men allow themselves to be used as messengers of Satan for our temptation, they are easily recognized. As a rule, fawners or flatterers, by their expressions of false sympathy and affection, inspire us with aversion, and we quickly discover that they are the enemies of our souls. The devil is more subtle; he dissimulates, and insinuates false ideas, of such a nature that the poor soul is almost always persuaded that they proceed from itself, and, not discerning the perfidious enemy, it is the more easily seduced.

This invisible and cunning foe is stronger than man, and understands better than any how to excite the imagination, to arouse the passions and the cupidity of men, to stir up feelings of impatience and irritation, and to evoke in the mind torturing anxieties and thoughts which depress and discourage. He is also very tenacious; repulse him once, twenty, a hundred times, he returns to the charge and redoubles his attacks. In speaking of these enemies of our souls, St Paul calls them princes, the powers and rulers of this world of darkness. Those which he thus describes are the demons of the superior choirs. There were rebels in

all the ranks of the angelic hierarchy, and the higher among them have a proportionately more fearful power. Attacks from these princes of the infernal kingdom imply a contest of terrible violence. "Save me, O God," cries the Psalmist, "for the waters have come in even unto my soul. I stick fast in the mire of the deep: and there is no sure standing. I am come into the depth of the sea: and a tempest hath overwhelmed me" (Ps. lxviii, 1).

But even in conflict with these powerful enemies the victory is always assured, for, clever though the demons may be, their strategy is generally defective. Anger, hatred, and pride contribute to the blinding of these miserable creatures. They certainly have a marvellous understanding of the defects and passions of our nature, because these evils are the result of original and personal sin; but the supernatural elements of the same nature, the graces, the divine inspirations, the helps which God gives, are beyond them, and the more the supernatural predominates in any soul, the more it soars above their comprehension. "A baptized person is more of a mystery to them than an infidel, a just man than a sinner, a saint than a merely good man," says Mgr. Gay (*Vie et Vertus*, t. ii, p. 122). The greater, also, the difference between their mentality and that of the souls they would tempt, the less do they understand them. They attack them at the wrong time; they are too confident, and their defeat is certain. But even were their judgement infallible, their skill perfect, and the poor victim both ignorant and weak, still they would never succeed, for "God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that which you are able" (1 Cor. x, 13). In the case of a weak soul, God restrains their violence and sets a limit to their attacks, so that victory may always be possible to the tempted. The demons, when pressed by the exorcist, have more than once admitted with rage that, under the law of God, temptation repulsed recoils upon the tempter and increases his sufferings (*cf.* Cassian, *Conferences*, vii, 20); he is forced to withdraw, at least for a time, as declares St James: "Resist the devil, and he will fly from

you" (Jas. iv, 7). The superior demons have greater strength; they can prolong and intensify the contest; but the unconquerable soul will in the end put even these to rout, and can then take its rest. Later they may return, but the victor will have acquired new strength. These powerful demons attack the stronger souls; they also dominate and inspire the poor wretches, who, plunged in sin, instead of offering any resistance, deliver themselves up to these their enemies, seeking only further means of sinning. The less powerful demons attack the weaker souls. But all alike are able to overcome only those who consent to defeat, while God, who sustains his children, will always help them to profit from their temptations.

In his endeavour to destroy souls, Satan only succeeds in affording them an occasion for purifying, strengthening and sanctifying themselves; seeking to make sinners, he makes saints. "Count it all joy," says St James, "when you shall fall into divers temptations" (i, 2). The valiant soldier rejoices at the approach of battle, even if its issue is uncertain, but the soldier of God may rejoice yet more in that he is sure of victory.

3. *The victory is always to the will.*

Who wills to triumph, will triumph; who wills to yield, yields; such is the law. The will was meant to be the master-faculty and to direct man's life. With the help of the will and of divine grace we can always succeed in keeping the laws of God, and doing that which is pleasing in his sight. On one side we are importuned by the passions, on the other attracted by virtue; some men by their example influence us towards good, others towards evil; the inspirations of angels urge us Godwards; the devils would alienate us from God; but the will is the arbiter of our actions. The imagination may be stirred to enthusiasm for virtue, or it can be possessed by evil; the intelligence may be influenced by good or evil considerations; but the will remains always inviolate; it is intrinsically free, and upon it depends our eternal destiny.

This noble faculty, whose role is so grand, has been endowed by God with power sufficient for the fulfilment of its task; power which, like all others, is given first in the seed, develops gradually, and attains slowly to perfection. Its growth must be cultivated and directed, and this is where education plays its part, for educators take the weak and inconstant will of the child and endeavour to correct and strengthen it. Their success, however, depends on the co-operation of the will itself, which proves that it is truly master.

Rightly directed and strengthened, the will can accomplish great things. Men of ardent and tenacious wills will surmount obstacles, triumph over opposition, and succeed in all enterprises. Those who are irresolute, inconstant, and timid will accomplish nothing worthy of note. This applies as well to merchants and manufacturers as to great writers, generals, and politicians. It has been said: "Genius is eternal patience." True; but genius also supposes great gifts, although it depends for their fruition on patient and determined labour.

The supernatural work of our perfection demands still greater labour and effort, and an even more upright and energetic will. This will must triumph over the inferior faculties, dominate the feelings, bridle the imagination, master the appetites, and inspire the soul with the desire of self-renunciation for the sake of doing good.

4. *How to strengthen the will.*

To inculcate self-mastery and to strengthen the will, God works upon it with marvellous wisdom and patience. He first reveals to the soul the beauty of virtue and the hideousness of sin, and thus he excites in the will a desire for the practice of virtue; if the will then proceeds from desire to resolutions, its actions will be free and meritorious.

At the beginning of a life of piety, consoling grace makes this consent of the will easy, for the other powers help it in its aspirations for good. The senses and the imagination are stirred to holiness, the heart is up-

lifted, and exercises of piety, prayer, and communion procure for the soul the purest joys. But in giving these delights the Lord demands also acts of virtue which mortify and exercise the will.

It is then that the courageous soul may be distinguished from the slothful and the selfish; for the former will be generous, while the latter will shun sacrifice. Weak souls can only make progress by giving up their habits of self-indulgence, and determinedly exercising their will in energetic efforts. To the faithful soul the Lord will offer continued combat; a passing effort could be too easy a thing, so the struggle is prolonged, the demons redouble their attacks, Nature reiterates its cry for satisfaction, and other men seek, by their criticism, their counsel, or their example, to turn the soul aside from the path of duty. All these enemies must be conquered, and tremendous energy will be needed.

For perfection is the outcome only of great struggles, and the reform of character is the fruit of the hardest of these. Expel the natural, it returns at a gallop. Recollection and prayer require great strength of soul; long and painful must be the effort if we would practise perfect renunciation, mortify the heart, the body, the tastes, and the judgement, and cultivate humility and charity. God calls his creatures to many a combat, but he upholds them through all. He will not always accord them consoling graces; the day will come when, in order to strengthen the will, the Lord will withdraw his support. The soul must then pass through a state of aridity and apparent powerlessness; the other faculties now hinder instead of helping her; the imagination is the prey of vagaries; it distracts the intellect and turns it aside from the truths of faith to passing things; the heart is not only cold and indifferent to good, but even feels a distaste for the pious duties which formerly charmed it. It is then that the will must concentrate itself on the fulfilment of duty. The enemy, in these critical moments, seeks to enervate the soul by persuading it that all effort is useless and impossible. "I cannot!";—fatal words, which enervate the soul at a moment when, if ever, great energy is needed. "I

cannot pray," you say. But prayer is a duty; if at times it prove a difficult one, nevertheless grace to perform it will always be given us, and the Church has justly condemned the Quietists, who claim that the soul should keep silence and never make petitions. St Ignatius recommends that if prayer be found difficult it should be prolonged, "as in this way we learn not only to resist the enemy, but to confound him" (*Exercises*, 13th annotation). When Nature rebels, when the nerves are irritated and the passions are inflamed, it is then that the will must exert all its strength, and it will always win the mastery. "I am not strong enough; I cannot conquer myself," is the excuse of those who love but little—a lying excuse.

A person in the clutch of temptation once declared to Blessed Anne of St Bartholomew that it was impossible for him even to make an act of faith. The holy Carmelite, moved with pity, interceded for him, and the Lord replied: "Tell him that he is wrong; the help of my grace is stronger than temptation" (*Divines Paroles*, xix, 8). He who would be faithful to God and love him with a perfect love should take for his motto: "Never count the cost." He must resolve to realize in his life the words of the *Imitation* (i, 25): "In proportion as thou doest violence to thyself, the greater progress wilt thou make;" and those others also of St Ignatius: "Let each man know that he will advance in the spiritual life in proportion as he renounces self-love, self-will, and self-interest" (Second Week, *Election*).

"Stand fast in the faith . . . be strengthened," says St Paul (1 Cor. xvi, 13). According to the Psalmist (xiii-xxv), God has placed in the depths of each soul a mine of holy energy, the existence of which we hardly suspect, but which he wishes us to develop. We should by strength of will draw out and use this hidden power. But how few, alas, have the necessary courage for this labour! They will not persevere unto perfection, so that after ten or twenty years, or even a lifetime of piety, they still find prayer difficult and mortification impossible; their character needs still to be reformed;

their patience is quickly exhausted; and trials which valiant souls regard as light they can hardly endure without irritation. These persons never grow beyond spiritual infancy. As children are too weak to render any but the lightest services, so they who only practise the lesser virtues give God but little joy.

Those who make greater efforts acquire higher virtue; but how far more heroic are they who deny themselves in all things and scorn to seek repose! Half-victories leave the soul still weak, but a complete and vigorous conquest enfeebles the enemy, strengthens the victor, and leads to fresh victories. The day will dawn when the will, freed from all imperfections, will be as a docile instrument in the hand of God. Henceforward the Holy Spirit will strengthen and direct it; the gift of fortitude will be to it, not a fugitive blessing, but a continual possession, and how precious will be its fruits! Constant equanimity of soul will be enjoyed through this abiding Spirit; nothing will disturb us, neither painful surprises, nor provoking contradictions, nor the most disconcerting events. Fortitude is strength united to sweetness (Wisdom viii, 1). Souls possessing this divine gift are not rigid and obstinate like those who have merely a natural strength of will, but they are strong in contest with the devil, gentle with their neighbour, and severe only with themselves. They perform without hesitation acts of virtue before which the ordinary Christian would quail, and the profound peace in which they live proves that this is not merely the effect of an acquired habit of mind, but is also and especially due to the action of the Holy Spirit. This peace is not only the satisfaction of victory won; it is the fruit of a superhuman joy of sacrifice.

The dispositions which we have just described are those of souls arrived at the unitive way, and they are found in far greater perfection in heroic souls. All who would be saints must make this resolution: "Never to count the cost." They must will inflexibly to love God, to work for him, to immolate themselves for him. To give him pleasure nothing seems too hard; they recoil from no sacrifice, but march from victory to

victory. We, too, not counting the cost, will struggle with all the energy of which we are capable; as soldiers of God, we will fight for his love and his glory, and our victories will be his.

CHAPTER XII

TRIALS

1. *The designs of Providence in trials.*

"Simon, son of John, lovest thou me more than these?" "Yea, Lord, thou knowest that I love thee." "Simon, son of John, lovest thou me?" "Lord, thou knowest that I love thee." "Simon, son of John, lovest thou me?" "Lord, thou knowest all things: thou knowest that I love thee" (John xxi). This is the question that God puts to each one of us when he wishes to test our sincerity, for he himself has said: "The Lord your God trieth you, that it may appear whether you love him with all your heart, and all your soul, or not" (Deut. xiii, 3). One profession of love does not satisfy God; he desires to be assured of it continually, and demands of us ever new proofs. In this way he strengthens our inconstant hearts and inflames our affections. God desires that we should love him above all else, with an ever-increasing love, that shall overcome all obstacles and develop in strength and depth through its victories.

He therefore sends trials to test us, trials which are but as the voice of God saying to us: "My son, lovest thou me? Then prove it by making this sacrifice for me, by offering this act of virtue for my joy and glory." If we are generous we shall answer: "Lord, thus will I prove my love." And by giving all to God we shall destroy every obstacle to love and render it pure and powerful.

What reality would there be in virtue that was never tested? All the works of man must be put to the proof. Take the case of a bridge, which may indeed have a fine appearance, but before it can be trusted for traffic it must be tested, lest when called upon to carry heavy burdens, or to be traversed by fast railway trains, it

might collapse. It is often thus, alas! with human virtue. We may be filled with holy ardour and love of goodness; we may delight in exercise of piety, in beautiful ceremonies and edifying sermons; but let sudden temptations, disappointments, losses, or sickness overtake us, and how do we bear those crosses? Is our virtue equal to the burden?

You, beginners in the spiritual life, who find now only charm and happiness therein, be prepared for trials! Job had spent many years in the practice of every domestic and social virtue. He was, we are told, "the father of the poor, the eyes of the blind, and the feet of the lame"; he was esteemed and loved by all; before him even the aged were respectful, and the chiefs of the people silent. His sole desire was to continue in this happy and virtuous state of life: "And I said, I shall die in my nest, and as a palm-tree shall multiply my days."

How many have had similar dreams! What beautiful pictures have been drawn of the future by inexperienced servants of God! "I will serve God faithfully; I will devote myself joyfully to the service of others; my refreshment shall be found in prayer, reading, and meditation; as I increase in fervour I shall experience ever-greater transports of love; all works of charity will be a delight to me, and my affection for those I help will certainly win their hearts. I will spend myself without counting the cost, and love and gratitude will be my reward. So will I pass my earthly life, and when the end comes I shall die peacefully in my little corner, blest by God and beloved by men."

Who in the days of youth has not drawn some such beautiful vision of the future? Does not each one of us, when embracing a state of life, envisage it through a rosy mist? A young man or girl entering upon marriage or dedicating themselves to a life of good works, a seminarist on the threshold of the priesthood, a novice training herself for the religious life—all of these see stretching out before them a future smiling and sweet, honourable and successful.

And the hopes of these young hearts are not all

illusion. The future prepared by God for those who love him is indeed a happy and a glowing one; if they are faithful they will acquire greater merit, and will glorify God and serve his Church better than they now even dream of doing; but they must first be purified and strengthened by trials, so that they may become fruitful labourers of the Lord.

2. Examples of trials sent us by God.

Even under the Old Law, before the Man-God had been given as our example, and when divine justice ruled by temporal laws, the Lord put the fidelity of his chosen servants to the test. Abraham was called to leave his country without any explanation of his exile, and to trust in God's promise of a son to his old age; he was even put to the supreme test of being asked eventually for the sacrifice of this beloved son. Isaac waited twenty years for the fulfilment of God's promise to his marriage, and was finally rewarded by the birth of Esau and Jacob; his fidelity to the true God was also further tried by having to live among idolaters. Jacob, driven from his father's house by Esau, and reduced to becoming a servant to Laban; suffering, too, through long years the loss of his beloved son Joseph, yet never lost his confidence in God. Joseph was the most virtuous of all Jacob's children, and was also the most tried, but he remained faithful to his God. He suffered in the guarding of his chastity, and he showed himself gentle and generous to the brethren who had been so cruel to him.

The story of the Hebrews' deliverance from Egypt and of their sojourn in the desert is full of instances both of the great blessings lavished by God upon his people, and the great trials to which he subjected them. Jehovah, he who is, gives to Moses and Aaron power to perform miracles; seeing which, and receiving from these two messengers of God the promise of deliverance, the Israelites greatly rejoice; but to try their faith God permits that Pharaoh, far from setting them free, shall make their service heavier. This first trial is ill-borne,

for the people begin to murmur. Vanquished by the plagues which afflict his country, Pharaoh at length permits the Hebrews to depart; but he soon sets out in pursuit of them. At this, though already so miraculously saved and led, the Hebrews cry out in fear. A new and dazzling proof of divine protection is then given them in their passage through the Red Sea; but three days later the people, on arriving at Mara, find only a bitter spring, and this fresh trial is greeted by renewed murmuring. God then performs a miracle, giving Moses power to make the brackish water drinkable. Some days later there is a scarcity of food. Surely this time God might expect faith from his people; but again there are complaints, which he answers with the gift of his manna. At Raphidum there is a drought, and this trial is also badly borne. God again performs a miracle, and water springs from the rock. On Sinai, God displays his power and majesty; the lightning flashes, the thunder rolls, the voice of Jehovah is heard by all the people, and he proclaims the Decalogue. Thus strengthened, the faith of the people should now be unshakable. God tests it by keeping Moses on the mount with him for forty days; but, instead of showing fidelity, this ungrateful people prostrate themselves before a golden calf! After leaving Sinai, the Hebrews suffer on the march; they cannot endure the fatigue, and murmur again. An avenging fire then chastises them until Moses, as before, intercedes for the cessation of the scourge. Incited by the strangers whom they had brought with them from Egypt, the Hebrews now begin to complain of having only manna to eat, and God punishes their request for meat by sending quails in such quantities that they gorge themselves and fall ill. At Cades, the Lord commands that twelve explorers inspect the country of Chanaan; these, upon their return, disseminate discontent among the people, who join in their murmuring. Then the Lord, indignant with so much ingratitude, condemns them to wander forty years in the desert, and proclaims that none of these incorrigible grumblers shall enter the Land of Promise.

The evil and self-indulgent spirit of the people of Israel gave infinite pain to their leader, Moses; but the faith and love of this great servant of God were as strong as those of the Israelites were weak, so the trials which confounded them only increased his holiness.

The stories of David, of Élias, of Eliseus, of Tobias, and of Job are all those of virtue put to the test, and emerging from all contests triumphant, and stronger through its victories.

Both by word and example, Jesus demonstrated the attraction of virtue; but he also put his auditors to the test. The great miracle of the multiplication of the loaves of bread, which he worked near Capharnaum, should have tremendously fortified the Galileans' faith; the confidence of the assembly at the time, and its enthusiasm were such that they wished to make him king; but the following day, in the synagogue of Capharnaum, Jesus propounded to these same men the eucharistic mystery. He announced that he would give them his flesh to eat and his blood to drink. Designedly he permitted a great obscurity to veil this sweet mystery, and responded to their pressing objections only with more positive assertions. He thus put their faith and confidence to the test, and alas! with what result? "After this many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him" (John vi, 67). Among the murmurers and the incredulous was the apostle Judas, and Jesus that day called him a devil (John vi, 71).

The rebels were of those who loved themselves more than they loved Jesus. Love gave his true friends power to trust him; to believe that One so powerful, so good, and so wise, knew well whereof he spoke, and would certainly fulfil his promise, even though the how was hidden from them. Had he not, as said St Peter, the words of eternal life? Such as these profited by the trial, and advanced in faith and love. So by the same means we see some fortified, others alienated, and a division takes place between the ardent and the lukewarm.

Jesus acted in the same way with his compatriots at Nazareth. He first impressed them with his heavenly

eloquence: "All gave testimony to him, and they wondered at the words of grace which proceeded out of his mouth" (Luke iv, 22). They already knew of the miracles he had performed, and to these were now added shining proofs of his divine wisdom; nothing was wanting to encourage their belief in his declaration that he had been sent by God. But they desired the Saviour to satisfy their curiosity by performing a miracle before their eyes, and he refused. This was the test of their faith, but it only provoked their anger to such an extent that they wished to throw him down from the cliff at the southern extremity of their town. The trial that was to have effected their sanctification became their ruin.

When Jesus came to Jerusalem at the Feast of Tabernacles, his words at first excited admiration in the Jews, and even stirred a spark of faith in their hearts. "When he spoke these things, many believed in him" (John viii, 30). They had seen miracles enough to inspire them with a secure and solid faith; so Jesus put them to the test. He told them that the truth would make them free, a saying which wounded their pride. "We have never been slaves to any man," they answered. And Jesus replied: "Amen, Amen, I say unto you, that whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin" (John viii, 34). He sought to enlighten them, but the more he showed them the path of duty, the more furious they became. Still speaking gently, Jesus proceeded to affirm his divinity, declaring that he had existed before Abraham; and they thereupon attempted to stone him to death.

The tests imposed on the gross and ignorant Israelites were but slight ones, proportioned to their virtue; to those whom he loves,—souls further advanced in the way of holiness,—Jesus gives greater trials. One day, as he was passing through Perea on his way to Jerusalem, a young man, one of the nobles of the country, ran to him. "Good Master," he said, "what shall I do that I may receive life everlasting?" This young man was virtuous, he had kept the divine laws from his youth, and Jesus, looking upon him, loved him (Mark

x, 21). Because he loved him, Jesus subjected him to a severe trial,—asked of him a great sacrifice: "One thing is wanting unto thee; go, sell whatsoever thou hast and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven, and come, follow me." Alas! the young man failed in the test, and went away sorrowful.

The woman of Chanaan was wiser. The compassionate Saviour, who often, as at Naim, did not wait to be asked to perform his miracles of goodness, intended to grant her prayer; but he began by rebuking her. In this case the trial but exemplified the humility and confidence of the poor mother.

The two sisters of Lazarus were chosen souls, very dear to the divine Master. "Jesus loved Martha and her sister Mary, and Lazarus" (John xi, 5). When their brother was ill they sent to the Lord this touching message: "Lord, he whom thou lovest is sick." Jesus made no reply; he even remained two whole days where he was, and permitted his friend to die. When Lazarus had been four days in his tomb, he came to Bethany. The two sisters had taken no offence at the apparent coldness of the Master who could so easily have preserved Lazarus from death. They had accepted this great trial with resignation, and did not dream of complaining or of doubting for an instant the goodness and love of Jesus. In Martha resignation predominated, in Mary abandonment; and both having perfectly fulfilled the Saviour's expectations, they were rewarded by the resurrection of their brother.

This was the greatest miracle that Jesus had hitherto worked, and all who had known Lazarus should have been edified. Jesus had already given ample proof of his power, his wisdom, and his virtue, but this new wonder still further impressed the people. "Many," says St John, "believed in him," so that the enemies of the Saviour were greatly disturbed. "If we let him alone so, all will believe in him" (John xi, 48). The faith of the people had now to be put to the test, and this is soon done. They enthusiastically give a triumphant reception to Jesus, the Wonder-Worker; but a few days later we see him captured by his enemies,

bound, maltreated, scoffed at, and crucified. He gives now no further sign of his power; only his superhuman sweetness, his peace, his calm, bear witness to his divinity. A few, like the centurion and Nicodemus, are more impressed by his goodness and patience than by his apparent weakness; their faith emerges from the test strengthened and enlightened; but the greater number are scandalized, and their new-born faith is destroyed.

After his Ascension, Jesus still continued to test his friends; the apostles' lives were one long series of such trials, trials which are always and invariably the portion of the true friends of God.

3. *Trials may be beneficial or baneful in their effects.*

A trial of any kind is the voice of Providence calling us to the practice of heroic virtue. It may come in divers forms: in that of some duty which we cannot conscientiously evade; or of persecution which will demand courageous acts of renunciation in defence of the cause of God and his Church; or we may be tested by events in our lives which make it extremely difficult for us to follow the divine teaching. Failure in such cases, though not an actual sin, would yet be a falling away from perfection.

There are great trials and little ones, exterior and interior. We may be called to spend ourselves in God's service, which tests our devotion. Or we may have to bear renunciation and suffering, which tries our patience. Often, also, God asks of us perfect confidence and abandonment. It may happen that persons who have hitherto lived in peace suddenly feel a violent repugnance to all the practices of charity. Or again, in the case of a heart which is imbued with a too lively human sympathy, a severe struggle may be necessary for it to attain self-detachment and purely supernatural love.

There are trials which determine a whole life. When in 1790 the infamous law of the civil constitution of the clergy was passed in France, the ordeal for the

ministers of God in that country was a grievous one. In the Diocese of Angers the majority of priests were faithful. M. L'Abbé Gruget, who gives a detailed account of the history of this cruel trial, tells us that most of those who refused to take the schismatic oath were priests of intrinsic virtue, while those who fell away were, for the most part, men of poor character and reputation. The first did what was expected of them, the second what it was feared they would do. There were, however, exceptions. In some cases estimable and pious priests succumbed to the temptation; while others, who had been frivolous and worldly, found courage to do their duty. Those who fell, and did not immediately retract, sank ever deeper, even to the extent of persecuting their faithful brethren; the others, on the contrary, became again men of devotion to duty and virtue.

Thus in all lives there come crises through which the voice of Jesus asks: "My son, lovest thou me?" Those who refuse their love cut themselves off from the divine Master; but the generous and devoted, who give themselves whole-heartedly to him, are united ever more steadfastly to their God and Saviour.

Little trials come to us all through life. In addition to the pious duties which we impose on ourselves, there are those which come to us from without, and which call for the exercise of patience and the renouncement of self-will. These are so much a part of the life of every human being that it seems scarcely proper to class them as trials; nevertheless, if we perform them perfectly, they will be fruitful of good. Extraordinary trials demand great courage and fidelity; these would seem to be opportunities afforded us by Providence for proving our love and acquiring strength and generosity in God's service. Alas! to a number of souls they prove to be but the rock upon which their virtue makes shipwreck.[1] How many Christians, who at first give

[1] Father Faber, in his *Growth in Holiness*, searches after the cause of the defection of such souls, and traces it to lack of contrition for sin. It seems to us, however, that they had only the appearance of fervour, and that it was lack of generosity which blunted their

the brightest promise, afterwards fall away and are unfaithful at the moment of trial! How many who have been well instructed end by straying from the path of virtue and forsake even the essential duties of religion! How many pious souls stop halfway on the road to perfection, because in times of trial they have shown only mediocre generosity!

Trials play a most important part in our spiritual life, for they, above all else, determine our progress. The holiest souls are those who have borne the heaviest trials with the greatest degree of courage; the mediocre, while not altogether rebellious, have yet failed to rise to the heights demanded of them, even though God has spared them troubles which they could not have endured; the unfaithful are those who have laid down their arms in the day of combat and shown themselves traitors.

Such are the marked differences in the manner of accepting trials; but there are many finer gradations, and as trials are borne well or ill, passably, indifferently or badly, so will be the effects which they produce on our characters.

4. *How we can profit by our trials.*

How should we act in the hour of crisis? Before all things, we must pray for strength and courage. We shall treat presently of prayer. Here we would only say that Christians who do not pray always succumb; those who weary of praying will reap no profit; those who redouble their entreaties and persevere as long as

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appreciation of the horror of sin; love would have given them tears of contrition. Tauler (edition of *Surius*, trans. Noel, first sermon on the Circumcision) traces laxity to three causes: "unregulated affection, which has not been controlled; a lack of humility, and a want of recollection." These are indeed frequent causes of estrangement from God. But is it not more correct to say that souls become lax who are unfaithful to grace, who refuse sacrifices, who pray without fervour, and accept with a bad grace the trials which God prepares for their perfecting, so that these very tests of their love, instead of increasing it as they should have done, only inflame their self-love, and drive them further from God?

the struggle endures will always gain the victory. Let us, then, pray without ceasing; and let us love. Since the end of trials is to strengthen our love, we must meet them with love. The great obstacle to love of God is love of ourselves. If our aim is to forget self and to seek only the glory and the interests of God, our trials will then accomplish their destined work. Many people are so taken up with themselves that they do but weep and wail under the trials which God sends them; and because they think only of their own affliction they lose courage and yield. We are always inclined to magnify our troubles and to exaggerate the difficulties of an undertaking, for imagination is ever apt to impose upon us and to diminish our courage. When soldiers at war have to gain ground and drive the enemy back, they make the onslaught at a given signal, without delay or hesitation; the more impetuous their advance, the surer will be their victory. Even thus should we, in a transport of love, immolate ourselves on the altar of God and of duty. "It is for you, my God," we will cry in the presence of any difficulty. "May I love you, my God, and do your will!" This must be the cry of our hearts when sorrow, loss, or humiliation is our lot, when we have to toil for the kingdom of God and the salvation of souls.

St Francis de Sales gives us as a perfect instance of this: The daughter of a surgeon, whose father was obliged to bleed her during a sickness, while undergoing the operation only said: "My father loves me, and I am all his" (*Love of God*, ix, 15). She neither questioned nor complained; it sufficed her to love. Such, also, should be the abandonment of a soul completely united to God. The more she forgets herself, the more surely will God fill her with his love and with longing for his glory, and this will make all sacrifice easy. Let us, then, love; so will every trial but serve to increase the mutual love of God and of our souls.

CHAPTER XIII

THE IMPORTANCE OF THE INTERIOR LIFE

1. *The mistake of neglecting the interior life.*

M. Olier, on meeting one day with a young priest, asked him of what he was thinking. He replied that he was thinking of nothing in particular. "What!" exclaimed the servant of God, "Can there be a priest who is not for ever thinking of God and rendering him homage in his heart?" (*Life*, by M. Faillon, t. ii, p. 369). If he were still living, the holy founder of the Order of St Sulpice would to-day meet with many like that young priest,—worthy men, zealous women, even religious and priests, who would all have to echo his confession. And they would not even be ashamed of it; like many other Christians, they do not sufficiently value the interior life.

When Jesus returned to Nazareth after having worked his astonishing miracles at Capharnaum, his countrymen would not believe in his mission, nor would they acknowledge the surpassing holiness of Joseph and Mary. The life of the Holy Family in Nazareth had been an altogether hidden one; Jesus had done nothing that would attract attention, and the inhabitants of Nazareth, coarse and material by nature, appreciated only what appeared on the surface; to excite their admiration and gain their esteem, striking actions and wonderful works were required. Such are still the sentiments of the greater part of mankind; but they are quite contrary to the mind of God; "For man seeth those things that appear, but the Lord beholdeth the heart" (1 Kings xvi, 7).

It is not only the worldly or lukewarm Christians who fail to recognize the importance of the interior life. Many pious people devote themselves rather to the practice of exterior virtues and the correction of ex-

terior faults than to the reformation of their innermost souls. If they were asked to give counsel to others, they would recommend exterior practices and works, and this advice is not without value, but it fails to focus the soul's attention upon the interior virtues. It does not teach it to feed upon holy thoughts and to seek spiritual and divine nourishment. There are preachers of retreats who, while eloquently condemning the exterior faults of their auditors, give no instruction upon the interior life, who fail to recommend the practice of living in the presence of God and in union with Jesus.

Such is not the method of St Francis de Sales. It is one of his principles that, in the direction of souls, more attention should be paid to the heart than to exterior faults. "This fortress gained," he says, "the rest will surrender. When there is a fire in the house, we throw all the household goods out of the window. So when the love of God takes possession of a heart, all else counts as nothing" (*Life*, by M. Hamon, t. ii, p. 564). "When God," he says further, "sends me a generous soul to direct, I strive to kindle the fire of divine love in the four corners of that house, knowing well that if any worldly frivolities still remain therein they will be destroyed in the conflagration."

If we wish to destroy a forest, would we not indeed set fire to the trees rather than try to dig them up one by one? So with the forest of our faults; it will be more quickly destroyed by ardent love, developed through a well-directed interior life, than if we laboriously attack one fault after another.

Life is a continual alternation of thought and action, and the latter is the outcome of the former. A man's conduct depends entirely upon the habitual trend of his thoughts and sentiments; it is these, then, above all, that he should seek to control.

Thoughts and sentiments are always linked together. "Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also" (Luke xii, 34). Our hearts follow our treasure, our thoughts fly to the object of our love. If love governs our thoughts, these thoughts will increase our love, and love will inspire both words and actions.

We draw our treasure from the depths of our hearts, and its value corresponds to that of the mine from which it is taken. "A good man out of a good treasure bringeth forth good things: and an evil man out of an evil treasure bringeth forth evil things" (Matt. xii, 35). The purer the mind, the more perfect the actions. Happy, then, he who keeps a watch over his thoughts and feelings. If we thus cultivate the interior life it will produce the virtues of faith, hope, and charity, which unite the soul to God. Even the greatest truths make little impression on those who do not live the interior life, for their minds are absorbed by a thousand useless thoughts, and distracted by cares which banish serious reflection, so that they are unable to profit by the holiest teaching. Without an interior life the soul inevitably becomes barren; it is as the beaten path of the parable, from which the birds—that is, the vain and worldly imaginations of the mind—carry away the good grain which had been sown. In place of holy and supernatural thoughts, souls thus distracted become the haunt of merely human or even vicious ones—of vanity, self-love, love of ease, attachment to the goods of this world.

"You are from beneath," said Jesus to the Jews: "I am from above" (John viii, 23). You desire only the pleasures of earth, the satisfaction of your body and your senses; this is the object of your life. The truly pious will, perhaps, never fall as low as these Jews to whom Jesus was speaking; they will always endeavour in some measure to live the interior life, but this life must be developed with fervour if we would overcome our perverse inclinations and train our souls to likeness with God.

Purity of intention is also a fruit of the interior life. "Take heed," said the Saviour, "that you do not your justice before men, to be seen by them." Purify your intentions; see to it that your actions are prompted by supernatural and holy motives; for the value of the action depends upon the intention. Many deeds which seem beautiful in the eyes of men are of little merit in the sight of God, and vanity in particular, against which

our Lord warns us, is a great robber of merit. Rarely indeed does a true Christian act solely with a view to acquiring the esteem of men; but the intentions are often mixed, so that to the desire of God's glory is joined, almost unconsciously, some hope of human advantage. How could those who live a merely exterior life, who make no effort to reanimate their faith or rekindle their love, escape this condition of mind? They will fall victims without either realizing it or grieving for it.

2. *The fruits of the development of the interior life.*

Those who live the interior life understand their own heart, and if any sentiment arises therein which has not God for its object they immediately bewail and renounce it. Our Lord charged his apostles to seek, above all things, union with him. "Abide in me, and I in you" (John xv, 4). We must abide in him if he is to live in us. "If anyone love me . . . we will come to him and will make our abode with him" (John xiv, 23).

The Holy Trinity is pleased to dwell in our souls as in a sanctuary or garden of delight. To this end did our Lord institute the Eucharist, that in it he might unite himself with us, body to body, mind to mind, soul to soul. O transcendent proof of the love that draws him to his poor creatures! How appalling is the indifference and ingratitude which does not hasten to welcome this loving and divine guest!

"Abide in me: and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abide in the vine, so neither can you, unless you abide in me. I am the vine: you the branches. He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same beareth much fruit: for without me you can do nothing" (John xv).

The living fruits are the works of the soul which is united to Jesus by sanctifying grace. The closer this union, the greater his influence upon her, and the more fruitful she will be.

Abide in me, first by a living faith. Do not only

believe, but feed upon my words. This is true union, for you will then think as I think, judge as I judge; you will enter into me, and I into you, imparting to you my thoughts, my desires, and my affections. I am purity itself, and you will partake of my purity. Already "you are clean by reason of the word which I have spoken to you" (John xv, 3); through me you are inspired with the love of God and with horror of sin; this is the beginning of purification, and the more you are impregnated with my teaching, the purer and holier you will become. Abide in me also by doing the works that I do. Let your faith be an active one; a dead faith does not purify; we must live our faith to experience its joy. Union with Jesus means not only to think as he thinks, but to will as he wills and to act as he acts. Love must unite us with him in our duties and in our labours; then will Jesus dwell in truth in the soul, enlightening it, embracing it, and communicating to it his very life.

"If you abide in me and my words abide in you, you shall ask whatever you will: and it shall be done unto you" (John xv, 7). These are the two conditions of power here below—to live in union with God and to follow his teaching. This is the life of the angels. Our angel-guardians never lose sight of God—"They always see the face of my Father" (Matt. xviii, 10)—and they faithfully execute his will. The desires of those who live in the presence of God are entirely holy; they have annihilated their own will and accepted the will of God; their attitude is one of entire submission and love, and their whole life is a prayer. Therefore our Lord is pleased to grant their wishes.

What abundant fruit do these true friends of God bring forth, and what glory they give him! "In this is my Father glorified," said the Saviour, "that you bring forth fruit and become my disciples." Immeasurable and far-reaching is the good accomplished, eternal is the glory procured for God, by these unknown but true disciples of Jesus, these hidden and unnumbered souls living in union with him! It will need great effort to attain to this life of union, this linking of exterior

works with the interior practice of the presence of God. Mother Mary of the Divine Heart compared the soul that is united to God in the midst of its work to a pianist, who with one hand plays the air and with the other the accompaniment; but long effort and exercise are necessary for the artist to execute this double playing. So in the spiritual life the greater the ardour and the perseverance shown by Christians in renouncing the things of self and of this world, and in seeking only the presence of God, the more powerful the grace they will receive to keep them steadfast in love, and to help them, without neglecting any of the duties of the exterior life, still to enjoy the advantages of the interior.

CHAPTER XIV

THE PRACTICE OF THE INTERIOR LIFE

1. *It is easier than is generally imagined to practise the presence of God.*

St Paul recommends the Colossians to "walk in Christ"; that is, to live in him, to act in unison with him, to be one with him, even as the tree is one with its roots, or the building with its foundations. "Walk ye in him: rooted and built up in him" (Col. ii, 6, 7).

The just men of old lived thus, grafted upon God, rooted in God. "Holy Scripture," says Mgr. Gay, "sums up the life, the works, and the virtues of the patriarchs in the words: 'He walked here below before the face of God'" (Gen. v, 22; vi, 9; xvii, 1; xxiv, 40). The Psalmist says of himself: "I set the Lord always in my sight; for he is at my right hand" (xv, 8). "My eyes are ever towards the Lord" (xxiv, 15). Under the Old Law men were in direct communication with God their Creator; the sight of his works and the remembrance of his benefits quickened their faith and their love. We of the New Law possess, in addition to this blessing, the knowledge of the goodness and the beauty of Jesus, himself the Way that leads to the Father; "No man cometh to the Father, but by me" (John xiv, 6). To live in the companionship of Jesus, in sweet intercourse with him; to live in the presence of God, in intimate union with the good Father who dwells in the inmost depths of our souls,—this is the practice of the interior life. "Never forget," said St Francis de Sales to his daughters of the Visitation, "that our one desire on earth should be the union of our souls with God" (*Life*, by M. Hamon, l. vi, ch. xi). St Thomas Aquinas on his deathbed exhorted the religious who attended him to the holy practice of the presence of God.

We sometimes hear, even from the lips of professedly religious people, the following objection: "It is impossible for us to keep our thoughts fixed always on God! What of the duties and anxieties that must absorb our attention? Inevitably we forget him for hours at a time; but if we seek his will and are careful, on awaking in the morning, to make him an offering of our works of the coming day, we shall nevertheless gain all possible merit, and God will approve of us."

This is the attitude of a servant to a master, not of a lover to his beloved. Do lovers find it difficult to remember each other? No; they cannot efface the image of the beloved one from their memory; by night or by day, at work or at rest, their thoughts fly ever to the object of their affection; so is it with a mother and her children, or with an attached husband and wife; and this constant remembrance deepens and strengthens their affection. If human love has such power over the heart, divine love should dominate it even more puissantly. "I will not suffer a human spouse to serve me as a model, or to surpass me in my love for my divine Spouse," once said a holy soul (*Life of Marie Aimée de Jesus*, ch. viii).

In saying that you cannot remember God in the midst of your occupations you accord to the one who loves you supremely a devotion inferior to that which earthly lovers give to a creature. How many frivolous and superfluous thoughts do you not entertain during a day? The duties of your state of life do not interfere with these, or with a thousand personal preoccupations, many of them useless and even harmful; let these then give place to your best friend, he who created and redeemed you, to whom you owe all! He resides in the depths of our souls as in a sanctuary, for we are the temples of the Holy Ghost. He is ever solicitous for our welfare, and waits for us to commune with him. Our response should be to retire from time to time within ourselves, to withdraw resolutely from all that is profane, useless, and ephemeral, all that is not actual, pressing duty; and convoking all the powers of our soul,

the aspirations of our heart, and the intentions of our will, direct them all towards God. In addition to these moments of complete recollection, we should also endeavour in the midst of our work to turn frequently to God in an act of quick and loving remembrance, with a short and fervent prayer.

2. *Hindrances to the interior life.*

Occupations ordained by God can never be obstacles to the interior life; for in every walk of life there have been found saints living in perfect union with God. Obstacles proceed rather from ourselves than from exterior things; they are often the result of a too great expansiveness. "He who truly loves Jesus," said Gemma Galgani's guardian angel to her, "speaks little and endures everything," and she tells us that he enjoined her never to express an opinion unless asked for it, and even then not to support it further but to return immediately to silence (*Life*, ch. xxiii). Curiosity is another obstacle. "Curiosity," says St Vincent de Paul, "is the pest of the spiritual life" (*Life*, by Abelly, bk. iii, ch. xxiv). People who are eager to see and know everything, and who take an inordinate interest in the concerns of others, will necessarily suffer much from distraction; they are incapable of the interior life, and are not fitted to receive the graces of God. The least fruitful of all the missions of St Paul was the one at Athens, and the inspired author of the Acts reveals the reason, telling us that "All the Athenians and strangers that were there, employed themselves in nothing else, but either in telling or in hearing some new thing" (Acts xvii, 21). Many pious persons fall into this snare, oblivious apparently of the benefits of which it deprives them. Tauler relates that Our Lord complained once to a holy religious of the great number of his servants in whom he found this distraction: "When I come to them," said the good Master, "desiring to fill their hearts, their souls, and senses with myself,—with perfect joy and love,—I find them so distracted and preoccupied that I am obliged to retire" (t. vii, p. 305).

What blessings would be ours if we would but withdraw ourselves from the noise and the voices of the world, and spend hours, or even days, in solitude! Jesus himself set us this example, especially when he was preparing for his great acts. He lived forty days in the desert before beginning his public ministry; and when his mission on earth drew to a close, before giving himself up to his executioners, he retired for a great part of the winter with his apostles to Ephrem, near the desert (John xi, 54), and in this quiet spot led a life of tranquillity and prayer.

3. *The struggle with the imagination.*

We must then be on our guard against the distractions of the world. Still, it is comparatively easy to ignore things which do not intimately affect us; the personal things, those which touch our affections or our reputation, are much harder to disregard. We are so accustomed to let ourselves drift with the current of our thoughts that the sweetness of such a course only becomes apparent when we try to renounce it. The first instinct of a loving heart is to think of the beloved object; and the heart invariably controls the imagination. We are inclined to cherish any plan of our own conception; we like to savour our joys, and a strongly-felt desire instinctively recurs; in fear, in anxiety, or in sorrow the mind will naturally dwell on the cause of its affliction. The control of the imagination is therefore a difficult undertaking, and for its success energetic efforts and a true spirit of renunciation are essential.

Furthermore, our implacable enemy has power over the imagination. He tempts us through this volatile faculty far more frequently than we realize. The evil, distracting, and covetous thoughts which so often beset us are the results of diabolical suggestions. St Peter tells us that the devil prowls about us unceasingly, seeking to destroy us. He employs all manner of stratagems, painting pictures before the eyes of the soul, filling the mind with seducing and disturbing thoughts, exciting the passions, flattering or irritating us, and

withdrawing our attention from all that would enlighten or soothe. Such is the ceaseless work of the demon tempters. If we resist them the battle rages; for, note it well, our greatest combats are fought interiorly; our direst defeats and our most glorious victories are hidden from the eyes of men; they see only the results.

Without a resolute curbing of the imagination there can be little progress in virtue. "We shall never arrive at perfection," said St Francis de Sales to his daughters of the Visitation, "while we harbour any smallest imperfection, even so much as a useless thought; you would not credit the harm thus done to the soul, for if you allow your mind to dwell upon useless things, it will thence proceed to harmful ones" (*Entretien*, viii).

Happy those who apply themselves whole-heartedly to recollection. God alone knows the victories daily won by fervent souls who struggle with their imagination, and generously will he reward them in the day of eternity.

Such victories are full of merit, for since the mind is easily led astray by the heart, many acts of perfect renunciation and complete abandonment must be made by those who would direct their thoughts aright, restrain them when they wander, and keep their hearts ever fixed lovingly upon God.

This exercise also weakens the force of temptation and makes the practice of virtue much easier. The Venerable Marie of the Incarnation bears witness to this, saying that the curtailing of superfluous reflection upon all that does not pertain to God, was for her, all her life, the most powerful means of progress (*Letters*, 56).

But how rare, alas, are the strong souls who advance thus from victory to victory! The greater number of Christians struggle so feebly with their thoughts that they are unable to enter into union with God. They halt midway between the summit of the mountain and the lowlands of the plains; some are so low down that they inhale their poisonous miasma, others, more vigilant and more generous in the combat, climb higher, but very few attain to the heights and so escape all evil influences.

Those who are unsuccessful complain of their distractions; they aspire to a more perfect interior life, but they do not recognize that their failure is due to a want of firmness and courage in those interior combats by which we attain to perfect recollection.

And yet God is ever prodigal of his graces. Even at the beginning of a life of piety, provided we do not refuse the Lord the sacrifices he asks of us, we may experience the sweetness of recollection. In this is shown the tenderness of our divine Friend, who desires to accustom his poor creatures to his society. He illustrates for us the truth of the words of the *Imitation*: "Christ will come to thee, holding out to thee his consolation, if thou prepare him a fit dwelling within thee. All his glory and beauty is within, and therein he takes delight. . . . Sweet is his communication with him, delightful his consolation, great his peace. . . . When thou hast Christ thou art rich, and he is sufficient for thee" (bk. ii, i).

This first taste of recollection lasts, however, but a short time. Its mission is to give us an understanding of and a desire for perfect union. It is followed by the hour of trial, when the soul, harassed by anxieties and longings, is tempted to hesitation and to compromise; the demon redoubles his seductive and hypocritical suggestions, and what at first seemed to have been an easy victory, must be refought with enormous effort.

"Seek the things that are above," said St Paul to the Colossians (iii, 1, 2). "Mind the things that are above, not the things that are upon the earth." Let your thoughts and affections rise to heaven, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. You wish to attain to the summit of divine love, but the distance is long and the goal high; take, then, the surest means of quick progress, the aeroplane. If you travel on foot, busy with everything along the way, you will make little progress; even if you go by rail there is much to retard you, and the stops at the various stations will delay your advance. Aviators, detached from this earth, fly quickly and rise with greater ease. Let us imitate them. Let us fly above all obstacles, contradictions and satisfac-

tions, above sufferings and joys, above human hopes, anxieties, and troubles. All around you are restless and fickle men; some may be wrong, some right; but unless the charge of them has been laid upon you, and charity calls for your help, halt not, but, praying for all and judging none, continue your flight. Your actions may expose you to the criticism and opposition of others; but remember that joys and sorrows alike pass away, in a week or a month all will be forgotten. Do not then linger on the road, but wing your way to the regions of divine love.

4. *The remembrance of Jesus.*

But what will support us on these heights? It is the thought of Jesus; his divine heart is the refuge which we must enter and never leave.

"Believe me," said St Teresa to her daughters, "your constant endeavour should be to live in the company of so wonderful a friend. If you acquire the habit of being near him, and thus show him that you love him and would please him, you will never be able to break with him. He will never abandon you; he will be your support in all your labours, you will find him everywhere. Is it a little thing to have such a friend always at your side?" (*Way of Perfection*, ch. xxvi).

Our gentle Saviour is so gracious and so lovable in his humanity, so great, so wonderful, and so loving in his divinity! Whoso looks upon him must needs admire him, and whoso admires him is drawn to him and becomes at length blessedly united with him in love. Behold him, the divine infant in his crib; so little, so humble, uttering gentle cries, nourished at the bosom of Mary! See him again in the land of Egypt, learning so graciously, he, the all-powerful, to lisp his first words and take his first steps. Contemplate him at Nazareth, the growing boy of four, seven, ten years old; the Master of the world, yet obedient to Mary and Joseph, and full of affection for them. At about thirteen years he begins his apprenticeship in the workshop of St Joseph, and accompanies him to the homes of his

patrons. For fifteen years, as a poor workman, he earns his living in the sweat of his brow; the Creator of the universe shares with Mary the bread which he has earned, the simple fare which his mother has prepared for him. At thirty years of age he enters upon his missionary life. After forty days of fasting and prayer he sets out on his first missionary journey through Judea and Galilee, living on charity, healing the sick, and training the little band of his disciples. Always and in all circumstances he is sweet and gracious, simple and affable; no one fears him, for he shows kindness to all. What patience, humility, and dignity he exhibits in the presence of his executioners! With what self-sacrifice does he go to meet the most frightful sufferings! How great was his desire to shed his blood and to suffer for us! Not content with the benefits he had already heaped upon us, his love and his wisdom plan a yet more wonderful miracle, the Eucharist. Here he abases himself even lower than in the Incarnation; he annihilates himself, makes of himself a prisoner that he may unite himself in utmost intimacy with each one of his children. For nineteen centuries he has dwelt in a multitude of sanctuaries, and from the depths of all his tabernacles he has never ceased to look upon me. Before I came into existence he thought of me, planning my welfare, the graces he would give me, the joys with which he would overwhelm me in his beautiful paradise. And this sweet Jesus is the great God, the God who calls himself "I am who am," the eternal, the all-powerful, the infinite. He lives in the companionship of his Father and of the Holy Spirit, in the exercise of a love boundless, uninterrupted, and surpassingly joyous. With this same love he has loved me from all eternity and will continue to love me throughout endless ages. And where is this great God to be found? He is within me; Jesus has entered into me in Holy Communion, he dwells in me, the three divine Persons are here in my inmost being; they never leave me; I can joyfully clasp my hands on my breast and declare that here I hold and possess, here I am possessed by the ineffable Trinity.

If we accustom ourselves at our early morning

prayer to realize this picture of the life of Jesus and his wondrous perfection; if, during the day, we recall his sweet presence, and immerse ourselves continually in his Sacred Heart, we cannot fail to lead a life of practical faith, confidence, and love; this is our share in the practice of the interior life.

How Jesus rejoices when the soul he loves and cherishes makes generous efforts to detach itself from all creatures for his sake!

"So long as another has the right to speak in the temple of your soul," says Tauler, "Christ is silent; it is not his home" (Translation Noel, par. 11, p. 242). "No, your soul cannot be his home if it admits strange guests with whom he will not hold converse." "If you do not stifle in yourselves all things save those which speak of the love of the divine Beloved, you will never hear his voice," said St Margaret Mary to her novices (t. ii, p. 69).

But if we persevere in the mastering of our headstrong imagination, if we resolutely rid our hearts of the created objects which captivate or trouble it, then Jesus himself will draw closer the links which bind him to the well-loved soul. He will bring it into a deeper, sweeter, and stronger communion with himself than its own most courageous efforts could ever acquire. Henceforward the soul will be drawn to God as the magnet to the pole; business and duties may occupy the mind, but the will is fixed in a simple, sweet, loving, and continual inclination towards God. The moment the soul is alone it turns to God. When human voices cease, it listens to the divine. Often while holding converse with men, feeling the need of counsel, it has recourse interiorly to its Protector, Guide, and divine Friend, soliciting his help, light, and strength. We shall do this naturally and instinctively; at any and every instant we can lift up our mind and heart to our Beloved.

It is a marvellous gift, this of the interior life, of the union of a love, no longer, as at first, superficial and ephemeral, but profound and lasting. The soul has attained to the unitive way; as St Paul enjoined, "Ye are rooted in Christ, ye live in Christ and Christ in you."

CHAPTER XV

DEVOTION TO THE SACRED HEART

1. *The benefits of the way of love.*

The practice of the presence of God and the constant remembrance of Jesus Christ will be our chief aids in the leading of the interior life and the cultivation of virtue. But we must remember that it is with a God of love that we seek union. Many, even among the faithful, do not really assimilate the fact of the love of God; they regard him as Creator, Master, and Lord, but not as a friend, the well-beloved of their heart. They love him sincerely, for they dread to displease him, and desire in all things to do his holy will and to work for his glory, but there is no tenderness in their love. Both in prayer and in action they are chiefly influenced by the thought of the beauty and wisdom of the various virtues involved. Certainly they meditate at set intervals on the goodness of God, but it does not influence them as it should. The path which such Christians follow is a good one, for it is not devoid of love, and it aims at attaining a greater degree thereof by the practice of virtue.

But there is another and an easier way, surer and more direct. It is the way of those who increase their love by the exercise of it, and so attain more quickly to perfection. While not neglecting other duties these seek above all things to learn to know Jesus, they are filled with a tender affection for him, and endeavour to live always in union with him.

For love of Jesus they turn their thoughts away from the things of this world that they may dwell in him alone. They practise complete renunciation for his sake and in order to do his will. They labour to correct their defects and to reform their character that it may resemble his and be pleasing unto him.

To study and reflect on the love of Jesus, the Man-

God, to perform all duties whole-heartedly for his sake, giving him love for love, to endeavour to console him for the defection of others, and to give him joy,—this is indeed the perfect practice of devotion to the Sacred Heart.

Our sweet Saviour has so greatly loved us, so loves us still, and will love us throughout eternity. He loves us both in his humanity and in his divinity, with the same love which animates the Father and the Holy Ghost, a love both infinite and eternal.

2. *The human love of Jesus.*

Wonderful is the love that the human soul of Jesus entertains for each one of us. God created the soul of Jesus in complete likeness to himself, and as he is perfect love, so also is Jesus. Love is the life of his holy soul; love dictates his thoughts, his desires, and his works; it is the principle of his joys and of his sorrows.

Whence, we ask, comes the might of this love? A simple reasoning will give us the answer. The soul of Jesus is the perfect work and masterpiece of God. In him the all-powerful has formed a soul capable of a love that surpasses in intensity not only that of all created men, but also of the angels, and of Mary herself, and he never ceases to pour out this immense love upon us. It flowed from the heart of the little Child, veiling his glory and hiding his power in a crib; there he already foreknew each one of us, and offered for each his humiliations, his sufferings, and his prayers. As the little boy of Nazareth, the young apprentice, the poor carpenter earning his bread in the sweat of his brow, ceaselessly he thought of us and loved us.

The love which he must hide in his Sacred Heart throughout these thirty years was a terrible martyrdom to Jesus. His Heart was pierced by the sight of the spiritual need of his creatures, the while he, though able to relieve it, must remain silent and hidden. At length the time comes when, in accordance with the divine plan, Jesus may begin his public ministry, and with what devotion does he consecrate himself to it! His love is

manifest in the rigorous fast to which he condemned himself, in his exhausting journeys under the broiling sun of Palestine, during which even he was sometimes compelled to rest, as at Jacob's well; it is shown in the long conferences and audiences given to all who sought him, which often left him no leisure even to eat, and earned for him the appellation of madman (Mark iii, 21); and it is love, too, which inspired the long prayers in which at times he passed the entire night.

The Master of the world gave himself to all, spent himself on all; he met the unfortunate half way. He did not even wait for the widow of Naim to implore his compassion, but, pitying her sorrow, he raised her son to life. How he delighted to console the afflicted, to give health to the sick, and, above all else, to win back souls to the love of his Father! What deeply sensitive feelings does he show, this sweet Jesus, who weeps over the death of Lazarus, and for the ungrateful city of Jerusalem, soon to suffer such frightful evils. His work at length consummated, he makes known to his apostles the three great desires which he had ever cherished in his heart: He longs to give himself to them in the Eucharist (*Desiderio desideravi hoc pascha manducare vobiscum*) (Luke xxii, 15); to shed his blood for his Father's glory and the salvation of souls (*Baptismo habeo baptizari et quomodo coarctor usquedum perficiatur*) (Luke xii, 50); and to kindle in all hearts the fire of divine love (*Ignem veni mittere in terram et quid volo nisi ut accendatur*) (Luke xii, 49).

His Passion was inspired wholly by love; the greatest torture suffered by our sweet Saviour was the knowledge of the countless outrages committed against his Father, of the sins of mankind and the evils they have entailed, and of the eternal damnation deserved by the many who would reject his sacrifice.

The love which was his martyrdom nevertheless sustained him, for he saw the vision of the fruits of his Passion, and thus found sweetness in his terrible sorrow. Why, after his resurrection, does he not exhibit himself to his enemies, living, invulnerable, clothed in glory? Why is he so modest in his triumph, revealing himself

only to his friends? It is because he desires to reign not by the splendour of his majesty, nor the display of his power, but solely by love, goodness, sweetness, and humility. In like manner does Jesus will to be glorified in his Church, in his saints, and by all his faithful servants; therefore he often permits his friends to be ignored, unappreciated, and persecuted. Our human weakness may yearn for a visible triumph of the Church, even as the Jews dreamed of a victorious Messiah; but a persecuted and despoiled Church will yet triumph through the heroic virtues of her children and through her conquest of souls.

Has Jesus ceased to love us since he left the earth? No, for St John declares that even sinners are very dear to him, and that he has become their advocate before the Father (1 John ii, 1). Even mortal sin, though he abhors it, does not change his love for the sinner into hate or anger; his heart remains full of sorrowful tenderness and compassion for the foolish ingrate, whom he still loves, and for whom he intercedes before the Father, pleading his sufferings and imploring for him the grace of contrition; which grace he always obtains, though the unhappy soul may refuse to profit by it. He also begs for the sinner the grace of perfect repentance, so that he may, if he will, completely repair his fault. If the ascended Saviour shows such tender love for sinners, how immeasurably he must love the just, and above all, those who are his true friends!

So greatly does he love them, that, if it were necessary, he would, for each one, re-enact his sorrowful Passion, endure again the torments of the cross, and sacrifice his life afresh. St John Eudes, in the twelfth book of the *Admirable Heart of the Mother of God*, which treats entirely of devotion to the Sacred Heart of Jesus, writes these words: "So great is his love that he would be ready to sacrifice his life afresh with stupendous suffering in every generation." He would willingly do for each one of the least of his creatures what he has done for all; therefore each of us can say with St Paul: "He loved me and delivered himself for me" (Gal. ii, 20).

Divine wisdom does not permit the repetition of the drama of Calvary, but Jesus has found a way of mystically renewing it and of applying its fruits. He immolates himself each day a thousand times upon our altars; he abases himself lower even than upon the cross; for us, and in our name, he adores, he gives thanks, he atones and supplicates, and thus, joyfully, through the holy sacrifice of the Mass, he pours out his grace upon the world. But even this does not satisfy his love. Not only does he descend upon our altars and everywhere multiply his eucharistic presence, but he makes himself ours in Holy Communion. He gives himself to us entirely, and invites us to renew each day this union so sweet to his heart.

3. *The divine love of Jesus.*

The love of the human soul of Jesus is indeed ineffable, yet it cannot be compared to the eternal and infinite love of his divinity. God is undoubtedly self-sufficing; he has no need of us; the three Divine Persons contain within themselves the source of boundless happiness; they love and desire each other with an infinite desire. "If they had not been already one in nature, this love would have fused and united them, made them one and the same God," says Mgr. Gay, (*Instructions in form of a retreat*, p. 1900). But they are united by nature; they possess each other mutually and in perfection. Nothing, then, is wanting to their infinite happiness, and we poor creatures cannot add to it. What are we beside God? To the all-powerful Being, whose pleasure it is to create worlds out of nothing, what is the worth of this insignificant creature, who cannot live or breathe without his support and help? In comparison with the Infinite, who controls the universe, what is the poor child of Adam, with his limited horizon and restricted action? To the changeless eternal, without beginning and without end, what is this puny traveller through life, whose time on earth is so short, and of whom no one dreamed a hundred years ago? Before the most Holy, what is this miserable creature, born in sin,

defiled by faults, and ever inclined to evil? Yet, through all eternity, before the world was made, the Three Divine Persons have had each one of us in mind. In the person of his Son, who is the mirror of his substance, God the Father has looked upon me; through his eternal Word, God has known me. "He saw me in himself . . . he loved me in himself; his love for me dates from that unknown time when first he began to love" (*Caritate perpetua dilexi te*) (Faber, *Creator and Creature*, bk. ii, ch. xi).

And with what measure does God love us? In no weak or feeble manner, for there is no weakness in God; in him all is infinite, so infinite alike must be his love and his goodness. "He loves us with a perfect love; nothing in God is incomplete; when he loves, he loves to perfection" (Faber, *Creator and Creature*, bk. ii, ch. xi). It is true that he seems to show greater favour to some than to others; he has his preferences, often even marked ones; but if he seems to bestow his benefits in an unequal manner, he does so by an act of will. His love is of an infinite ardour towards all, even for those for whom he destines the smallest measure of that ineffable gift, himself.

He gives himself; in such sublime fashion does God express his love. Because he loves us, he wishes us to know the joy of holiness, the joy of pure love. Holiness consists in hating and waging war against all that is evil and in cleaving to that which is good. God himself is the true, supreme, and essential good. To be holy is therefore to love and to seek God; the end of holiness is the possession of God. God desires us to seek him so that he may give himself to us, that in possessing him we may possess all riches. So he, who is sanctifying grace, gives himself to the soul, dwells in it, transfigures it, and unites it wholly to himself.

That this supreme good may be ours, God has performed the miracle of miracles. No mystery may be conceived which can equal the Incarnation, the Passion, and the Death of a God,—the Eucharist and Holy Communion. "God so loved the world as to give his only begotten Son" (John iii, 16), "and the Word was

made flesh" (John i, 14). What supreme love shines forth in this abasement! If, while still retaining his intellect, a man should consent to become a worm of the earth or some loathsome insect, he would still abase himself far less than did God in taking human form. God the Father willed this incomprehensible abasement of his dearly beloved Son. He did not spare even the Son so dear to him, as says St Paul: *Proprio Filio suo non pepercit Deus* (Rom. viii, 32). When Jesus prayed: "Father, if it be possible, let this chalice pass from me," the Father charged him, for our sakes, to drink it to the dregs. For love of us God became incarnate, submitted himself to every reproach, endured every suffering, and was put to death!

How beautiful, how sublime, how ravishing is this love of God for his poor children! In heaven, where it reigns in perfect freedom, we shall taste its delicious fruits, and find ever new and ineffable joys in being loved by God. "We may spend a million years in the bosom of the heavenly Father, and immerse ourselves ever deeper in this unknown sea of love, without even gauging its inexhaustible delights" (Faber, *Creator and Creature*, bk. ii, ch. xi).

We may well ask, why does God love us with so infinite an ardour? Why has he worked such miracles for us? What is there in us to provoke affection? There is nothing, absolutely nothing, save what his love has given. It alone is the sole source of all our virtues, of all our works; indeed, we have by sin impaired the very qualities with which he had endowed us. If we have accomplished any work of virtue or of self-purification, it is but through God's merciful grace, which has supplied for all our weakness and repaired all our faults. What we do for him is nothing but our strict duty; what he does for us is of his gratuitous bounty. Not in us but in him must be sought the motives of his love.

Is it, then, his justice which compels him so to love us? No; his love is not the product of his justice, for they go hand-in-hand. The justice of God is adorable. It does not, like our own, merely consist in respect for the rights of others, for God cannot be dependent on a

creature; it is the outcome of his infinite love of order and of perfection. It is manifest in the promise he makes when he declares that he will render to everyone according to his works. But even this is due more to love than to justice, for our works owe their value to his divine help, and the precious blood of the Man-God was shed to ensure their reward and to earn forgiveness for their many failures.

Is then God's love begotten of his holiness? God's holiness is an essential part of him. In us it is a quality superadded to our nature; but holiness *is* God's nature, his substance. He would not be God if he were not holy. Holiness consists in loving good and in hating and combating evil. Now God is the supreme, essential, true, and only good. So that, though in the creature love of self quickly degenerates into odious egoism, in God love of self is pure sanctity. God loves holiness in loving himself. Therefore, if we were able to distinguish among the attributes of God, which are in very truth blended in his unalterable unity, we should say: "God is love before being holiness."

Does his mercy, then, account for his love? Mercy is the pity of God for the weakness of man. It is the sympathy and condescension of an all-powerful creator for his feeble creature, the indulgence of a holy Father pardoning his sinful child. Mercy does not produce love, it implies it; it is the daughter of love, not its mother.

God loves us because he is all love. God is love: the life of the Three Persons, of the ineffable Trinity, is nothing but reciprocated love, infinitely ardent, infinitely holy. To all eternity they mutually contemplate and love each other; this is the essence of their being.

The love of God for his creatures is a free love; it is a part of the beauty of his heart. It is God's pleasure to love us, therefore he showers his benefits upon us, and the divine gifts with which he endows us still further rejoice and animate his love. According to the measure of his love for us, so ardently does he also desire our love. "God's desire for us is so great," says Tauler, "that it would seem as if all his beatitude were at stake.

Each of his creatures is as a voice inviting us to love him; all that he has done, or is still doing, has but one aim, to impel the soul to listen to his call for her love" (Translation Noel, t. iv, p. 128).

The least act of love from the most worthless of his creatures charms Almighty God more than all the magnificence of his works of nature, or the splendour of the stars with which he has peopled space. His works of nature and of grace are all designed to gain our hearts. It seems as if he could not endure the loss of our love. Even the punishment which he metes out to the obstinate and ungrateful, to hearts stubbornly closed to love, has no other aim than their salvation; and how eagerly he endeavours to bring hearts which have been unfaithful back to himself! "God," says Tauler, "is more prompt to pardon than is an immense brazier to consume the straw or tow cast into its flames" (t. viii, p. 48). "Never did a mother come more speedily to the help of her burning child than God to the assistance of the sinner" (Translation Noel, t. iv, p. 379).

How can we, then, refuse to our God that which he so greatly desires and so fervently implores? And yet, alas, from how many hearts does he receive, in place of love, only lukewarmness, indifference, and even outrage! How bitter to the loving heart is the spectacle of so much goodness on the one hand, so much ingratitude on the other! "Mine eyes have sent forth springs of water: because they have not kept thy law" (Ps. cxviii, 136). If we have any conception of God's tenderness and his thirst for our love, we shall strive to console him by our fidelity and generosity. These proofs of our love will be the sweeter to his Heart for the lack of them in so many of our brethren.

Love is the life of Jesus, so let it also be ours. We were created to love God, and love will be for ever our joyful employment in heaven. Let it, then, absorb us also here below, and may all our actions be inspired by love.

O Jesus, who dost love me so much, grant that I may both comprehend and respond to thy love!

CHAPTER XVI

PRAYER

1. *The benefits of prayer.*

WHENCE does man derive true greatness, moral beauty, the power to do good? From intercourse with God, and from this source only; for in himself man is but nothingness and weakness, and his corrupt nature inclines him inevitably towards evil. True, he possesses the light of reason as a weapon against his passions, but experience proves that his knowledge of what is right will not of itself ensure his performance of it; such knowledge must be reinforced by the help of God, obtained through prayer.

The more difficult the duties to be fulfilled, the greater is the need of grace, and the more earnest should be the prayer. The privileged ones of our Lord—those who have received much, and from whom in return much is expected—are called, not merely to a good and honest life, but to one of devotion and of pure love. But they can only fulfil such a vocation by giving themselves frequently and fervently to prayer.

The charge of Jesus, "We ought always to pray and not to faint" (Luke xviii, 1); repeated by him just before his Passion, "Watch ye, therefore, praying at all times" (Luke xxi, 36); and continually enjoined by St Paul, "Pray without ceasing" (1 Thess. v, 17); "Be instant in prayer" (Rom. xii, 12); is, for the favoured ones of God, more urgent than for any others, for they are the seed of the Church. "I have chosen you," said Jesus; "and have appointed you, that you should go and bring forth fruit, . . . that whatsoever you shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you" (John xv, 16). How grateful we should be to the Lord for this our vocation to prayer! O pious souls, and you who are consecrated to God, rejoice and be glad in

the favour God has shown you in giving you so great a power in prayer! Prayer is so mighty. Earnest prayer is sure of its reward; it brings the Omnipotence of God to the help of humanity. Jacob merited to be called Israel because he wrestled even with God himself. How did he prevail in his struggle with the angel? The prophet Osee tells us that it was through his tears and his prayers. "And he prevailed over the angel and was strengthened: he wept and made supplication to him" (Osee xii, 4). The prayer of homage to his wisdom, power, and love vanquishes the heart of God; it draws us near to him. He who prays is united with God; this divine contact transforms the soul into God, and through it he pours out his perfections on those who approach him. Prayer unites us to the saints and wins for us the vigilant protection and intimate friendship of these princes of the celestial court. Prayer is also a link between virtuous souls who, animated by like sentiments, offer to God the same homage, address to him the same requests, and draw down precious graces on each other. Two such souls, separated even by the ocean, are yet far more intimately united by mutual prayer than others who may be physically but not spiritually near together. By prayer we hold loving intercourse with the saints in heaven; by prayer we are united with the just here below, and share in their merits; the riches of God himself are ours through prayer.

How touching are the invitations of our Lord to prayer! "Watch and pray," are words ever on his lips. "Ask, and ye shall receive: seek, and ye shall find: knock, and it shall be opened unto you" (Matt. vii, 21; Luke xi, 9). Again and again does he renew the promise, "All things whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive" (Matt. xxi, 22). "Again I say to you, that if two of you shall consent upon earth, concerning any thing whatsoever they shall ask, it shall be done to them by my Father who is in heaven" (Matt. xviii, 19). "Whatsoever you shall ask the Father in my name, that will I do" (John xiv, 13). "If you abide in me and my words abide in you, you

shall ask whatever you will: and it shall be done unto you" (John xv, 7).

Such promises carry their own conviction. God could not do otherwise than fulfil them. It is his grace which inspires every fervent prayer, and fills us both with the desire for supernatural gifts and the faith necessary to obtain them. He encourages our requests, for his desire to give is even greater than ours to receive. We gladden the heart of God, then, when we pray; we give him that opportunity to bless us which he so ardently desires, and it need not therefore astonish us that he should be so liberal.

2. *The essential qualities of prayer.*

In the miracle of the multiplication of the loaves, each one received as much as he wished: *Distribuit discumbentibus . . . quantum volebant* (John vi, 11). It is still the same; God will grant only those desires which are sincere, wise, and holy, and we must see to it that our prayers possess these qualities if we wish them to be answered.

"You ask and receive not," says St. James, "because you ask amiss" (Jas. iv, 3). Your only desire is for self-satisfaction, and God is too wise to yield to your vain caprices. No confident request, however, even though it be imprudent, will be made in vain. God may not grant what you asked, but he will give you something better; you ask for a stone, he will give you bread; you desire a serpent, he will give you a fish.

Or again, even if what you begged for was good, your desire for it may not have been sufficiently sincere. You perhaps ask for humility; but you do not want humiliations, so you have not a sincere desire for humility. Or you may not be prepared to make the necessary struggle for the virtue you desire, and in this case it would be contrary to the wisdom and sanctity of God to grant it to you. It would also be contrary to your real desire. He, for instance, who prays for humility in the above frame of mind has but little desire for true humility, and will obtain but little. You may

desire and beg for the love of God, but are you willing to renounce self and to be immolated for his sake? If not, you really, though unconsciously, desire but a small degree of this love, and this is all you will obtain. In asking for some virtue, pray, first of all, that you may experience a real desire for it, and then say with all the sincerity of which your heart is capable: "Lord, help me to practise this virtue, cost what it may. I am willing to make any sacrifice. 'My heart is ready, O God, my heart is ready.' At any price I desire your love."

Divine justice and wisdom may often be forced to give less than we ask. Should you pray for the deliverance of all the souls in Purgatory; that God perform as many miracles of grace as there are sinners, so that not one be lost; that all your relatives and friends become canonized saints, it would be contrary to divine wisdom to grant such requests. God graciously takes into consideration the simplicity of his petitioners, but he still answers prayers only according to their merits. Should you beg to be given a virtue all at once and in perfection, it would be as if a beggar should ask for a thousand pounds. If the beggar were worthy of compassion you would give him something, but not such a sum as this. Each of your prayers for a perfect virtue will help you to make some progress in that virtue; but God has irrevocably ordained that a great struggle and long and constant efforts are necessary for the acquiring of true perfection.

Again, our requests, though pure and lawful, may be contrary to the divine plan. St Luke tells us that when St Peter was imprisoned by Herod, the Church did not cease to address prayers to God for him (Acts xii, 5). God heard those prayers, and sent an angel to deliver Peter from prison. Twenty years later he was again imprisoned by Nero, and the faithful in Rome must have prayed as fervently for his deliverance as did those of Jerusalem; but, according to the divine plan, the hour of St Peter's martyrdom had come, and the prayers of the Roman Church could not prolong his life, though they obtained other graces.

Nevertheless we may always trust in the efficacy of our prayers; and the greater our confidence, the more we shall obtain. The blind man of Bethsaida, who was brought to Jesus by his friends, seems to have had only semi-confidence at first, and was therefore only partially cured. "I see," he said, "men as it were trees, walking" (Mark viii, 24). This prodigy, however, increased his confidence, so that when Jesus again laid his hands upon his eyes he saw everything clearly. Many remain thus, only half enlightened, half cured of their moral infirmities, because they lack confidence.

Prayer is so pleasing to God, and so helpful in the practice of the great virtues,—of faith, hope, charity, and humility,—that the Lord, to encourage us to pray more, exacts perseverance as a condition of profitable prayer. It is his prerogative thus to test us, that he may prove our desires to be sincere and fervent and our hope firm. God gives much time to the completion of his works, so that men may the more appreciate them and gain merit by co-operating in them. More than forty centuries elapsed between the Fall and the Incarnation. The partriarchs had continually called on the name of the Lord; the prophets and just men of the Old Law had offered fervent supplications; but an incalculable amount of prayer was needed to obtain so great a benefit. Our Lord's delay in answering our requests enlightens us as to their value. If we obtained at once all that we asked, our enthusiasm would come to an end with our labours; life would cease to test us, and we should never know the meaning of true gratitude. As it is, we have to return to the charge, and learn to "pray without fainting."

We must remember the parable of the man who, by dint of knocking at the door, awakened his friend at night in order to secure his help; and the still more touching one of the poor woman who repeatedly begged justice of the unjust judge who, to rid himself of her importunities, granted her request. Who but Jesus would dare cite such an example, or compare our good and generous heavenly Father with so heartless a creature? Our Saviour did it in order to convince us that our

reiterated entreaties would far more surely be heard, and that they would draw down upon us treasures of grace from the Heart of God.

Only true humility can thus persevere; and it is in order to test the quality of our humility that God exacts perseverance in prayer. The humbler the prayer, the more powerful it is. "The prayer of him that humbleth himself shall pierce the clouds" (Ecclus. xxxv, 21).

Humility is undoubtedly most pleasing to God. It is indeed the only fit attitude for the creature in the presence of the Creator, for the sinner before the Saint of Saints, nothingness before the Infinite. Jesus was touched by the humility of the centurion (Luke vii, 9), and he rejoiced at the response of faith and humility on the part of the poor woman of Chanaan, whom he put to so severe a test (Mark vii, 28). Encouraged by her success, let us say from the depths of our hearts; "Oh, Jesus, do not reject me! I beg for charity, for love of the cross, for perfect humility. It sometimes seems as if you heeded me not, or that you would tell me, as you did this poor woman, that these beautiful and sublime virtues are for your faithful children, and not for such as me! 'It is not good to take the bread of the children and cast it to the dogs.' Yea, Lord, but these virtues are for all, even for those who, like me, have so often abused them. If I may not have them in the same heroic degree as did the saints, give me at least the crumbs that fall from your table."

God often appears to leave man in distress in order that he may foster his humility. Unhappy he who under this trial allows himself to be discouraged by self-distrust; and blessed, on the other hand, will be the man who, while abasing and humbling himself, still continues and redoubles his prayers.

Praise should accompany all our prayers. To pay homage to the greatness and goodness of God, and to dedicate ourselves to his service, should be the first aspiration of our hearts, and should take precedence of any personal interest. "When you pray," says St Basil, "be not hasty in offering petitions, otherwise you profane your intention, and appear to supplicate God only

from necessity. First forget all creatures and praise him who has created all" (*Const. mon.*, 1). In the model prayer given us by our Lord we address God by the beautiful name of Father; then we entreat his divine glory before making known our own needs.

Tobias, when plunged in affliction, turns towards the Saviour and offers him a homage which touches the divine goodness: "Thou art just, O Lord, and all thy judgements are just, and all thy ways mercy and truth and judgement. And now, O Lord, think of me, and take not revenge of my sins, neither remember my offences, or those of my parents. For we have not obeyed thy commandments, therefore are we delivered to spoil, and to captivity and death, and are made a fable and a reproach to all nations amongst which thou hast scattered us. And now, Lord, do with me according to thy will, and command my spirit to be received in peace" (Tob. iii, 6). Sara, the cousin of Tobias, and no less tried than he, also begins her prayer by rendering homage to God: "Blessed is thy name, O God of our fathers; who, when thou hast been angry, wilt show mercy, and in the time of tribulation forgivest the sins of them that call upon thee" (*ibid.* iii, 13). These are the prayers of hearts filled with love, and they go straight to the Heart of God.

3. *What should we ask of our Lord?*

What should be the object of our prayers? We may ask for all that is good and holy, for all that can be useful to us personally; but before all else we should desire and beg that God be known, loved, and glorified: *Sanctificetur nomen tuum, adveniat regnum tuum.* Mother Frances of the Mother of God, a saintly Carmelite of the seventeenth century, said, in offering herself as a victim for the glory of God: "Let him kill me, provided only that he reigns." The Doxology, "Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost," should be recited in this spirit.

The third petition of the Our Father, *Fiat voluntas tua*, which Jesus himself made under such poignant

circumstances in Gethsemani, is a prayer that should be often on our lips, for it sums up all the others. There is one will of God for whose accomplishment we do not need to pray, for it is assured: *Omnia quaecumque voluit fecit* ("all that God wills he does"). Thus it is his will that man be rewarded or punished according to his works, so that we do not need to pray for this; we have only to adore and bless his will.

God's purposes can tend only to his own glory, but he can accomplish them by any means that he will. He may send us success or humiliations, sickness or health, death or life. When he has plainly shown us what is his will, our *Fiat voluntas tua* must be a fiat of submission, of acquiescence in the divine pleasure. Since God can change the order of his divine Providence, we may ask to be spared some pending trial, and that his all-seeing wisdom may procure our welfare in another way. Such was the prayer of our Saviour: "Father, if it be possible, let this chalice pass from me, but yet not my will, but thine be done." Like him, we should ever adore, praise, and love the will of God and his "divine good pleasure."

Another aspect of the will of God is his teaching of his creatures to make a good use of their liberty. The province of this will is not the carrying out of that which God has decided from all eternity, but the pointing out to free creatures his divine preferences.

God loves good, and has an infinite hatred of evil. True, he tolerates its existence because he respects the liberty he has himself given his creatures; but while leaving us the power of free action, he at the same time reveals to us his expectations and desires. He manifests his will to us by means of laws, counsels, and inspirations, and he sends his grace to help us in its accomplishment. This accomplishment depends indeed upon his creatures, but on creatures submissive to the influence of grace. We ought to love this divine will above everything, and our chief aim should be to fulfil it ourselves and to help others to do likewise. This is not possible without the help of God's grace, therefore we must pray fervently both for ourselves and

for our brethren, "O my God, may thy will be done, and as thy will is our sanctification, grant that we may grow in holiness day by day."

God's love desires our welfare, so we pray; "O Lord, satisfy your love; remove all obstacles from its path; increase your help to human weakness, and grant to all your children, especially those for whom I pray, more light, more courage and strength, that they may the better accomplish your will by working for their own sanctification and that of others."

These words, "Thy will be done," should inspire all our prayers. "You desire me, O God, to be pious, humble, detached, mortified, and charitable. Help me to be so at whatever cost to myself. *Fiat voluntas tua.* Choose thou the means of my sanctification: 'Not as I will, but as thou wilt.'" What better gift can we ask for parents, for friends, or for the souls confided to our care, than that the will of God be accomplished in them? "'*Fiat voluntas tua.*' Since it is thy will, O God, that they be sanctified, do thou enlighten them and strengthen them, and make of them the saints thou desirest them to be." With regard to your country, the will of God is that she be truly Christian: "Grant, Lord, that she become so. Enlighten her electors; guide their hearts, that they may act with wisdom and uprightness, and give a good government to our country. Above all, give us holy priests, apostolic labourers. Reanimate the faith and rekindle the love of all. Such is your will, the fulfilment of which waits only for our prayers."

We often feel moved to pray that some course which seems good to us may be followed, or that another which we think undesirable may be avoided; but we must remember that we are not infallible, even though our intentions may be good. We are liable to be led astray by our personal desires and prejudices. Let us then say in all sincerity: "Lord, you know what is best, accomplish your will; show us how we should act, give prudence and strength to all and enlighten all minds. May your wisdom overrule all things to your greater glory and the universal good."

4. *Jesus our model in prayer.*

The example of our divine Master is our best lesson in prayer. Alone among earthly beings, Jesus, the Incarnate God, the equal of the Eternal Father and of the Holy Ghost, the Omnipotent, the Master of the world, might be thought to have had no need of prayer. He was man, it is true, and as man must do his heavenly Father's will; but since his interior life was a perpetual act of love of his Father, since his recollection was continual, and his intercourse with the Father uninterrupted, to what purpose did he spend hours in solitary prayer?

The answer is that he came to earth to be our model, and as prayer is our all-important duty, he willed to enjoin it by his example.

He teaches us when and how to pray. "And rising very early, going out, he went into a desert place: and there he prayed" (Mark i, 35). Early in the morning, before any of his disciples were awake, knowing that later they would surround him and keep him captive, the Saviour left the house of Peter at Capharnaum, and went to a desert place, where he could give himself up to prayer. St Luke tells how he interrupted his apostolic labours in order to retire into the desert to pray (Luke v, 15). Again, after the miracle of the multiplication of the loaves, Jesus, having obliged his disciples to go away in a boat, dismissed the multitude and "went into a mountain," where he remained for the greater part of the night alone in prayer (Matt. xiv, 23). As St John Chrysostom remarks, he arranges favourable conditions, he separates himself from all, he leaves the lowlands and goes up into a mountain, far from all earthly sound, he chooses the night, which is a time of silence, he sacrifices his rest, and thus teaches us to unite with prayer the self-denial which enhances its value. On the eve of the day on which he chose his apostles, he again went up into a mountain, and there spent the whole night in prayer to God (Luke vi, 12). O sublime prayer! What acts of adora-

tion and submission did it comprise! What protestations of obedience, what offerings of his whole being, what thanksgivings, what petitions for pardon and graces for those he was about to associate in his work, as also for all peoples, all generations, all souls! During that night Jesus thought of me and prayed for me.

Jesus prayed while John the Baptist was baptizing him (Luke iii, 21). He took his three chosen apostles, Peter, James, and John, up into Thabor to pray with him (Luke ix, 28), and it was while he prayed that the miracle of the Transfiguration took place.

During his journeys Jesus often separated himself from his disciples. This is shown on one occasion by his question to them: "What did you treat of in the way?" (Mark ix, 32); and St Luke teaches us that he acted thus that he might occupy himself with prayer. "As he was alone praying, his disciples also were with him" (Luke ix, 18). The apostles, who were as yet little advanced in the interior life, wondered among themselves when he made them walk apart from him that he might give himself up to prayer.

All manner of prayers fall from his lips; prayers of thanksgiving, as when, with touching emotion, he thanks his Father for having revealed himself to little ones (Matt. xi, 25); cries of distress from his stricken soul as in Gethsemani, "Father, if it be possible, let this chalice pass from me;" prayers of love, as on the cross, "Father, forgive them." All these prayers are as short as they are ardent, and our prayers should rise likewise to our heavenly Father from the depth of our heart.

We should, nevertheless, often pray at greater length, and Jesus has shown us how to frame these longer prayers. St John has preserved for us the prayer offered up by our Saviour after the Last Supper. It is an outpouring of his heart into the heart of his Father, free and familiar, giving expression first to one thought, then to another. He repeats, insists, and pleads, as might an accomplished advocate; "We have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the Just"

(1 John ii, 1); but always there is, too, the trustful abandonment of a loving and beloved Son. He prays for himself, for his apostles, and for all the faithful, present and to come. For himself he asks from God his Father victory over all those who would confound him and impede his mission; "Father, glorify thy Son, that thy Son may glorify thee." God's glory, then, should be the first of our intentions, the primary object of our desires and requests. "As thou hast given me power over all," continues Jesus, "grant eternal life to all those whom thou hast given me." Then a second motive is urged; "Thou hast given me a glorious mission; ensure its success; for only by my triumph can your designs be fulfilled; I appeal to your wisdom, as to your glory. I have glorified you on earth. I have finished the work that you gave me to do. Now, O Father, glorify me." This is indeed a moving plea that Jesus can urge; "Hear me, for I have rendered you perfect service." Alas, we cannot thus plead our own works, but we can plead those of Jesus, for he has merited for us the graces we desire. Jesus then prays for his apostles, and begs God's favour for them. Are they not the children of the heavenly Father's predilection, and has not his Father confided them to him? Have they not been faithful? Many others have rebelled against grace; one of the twelve even has betrayed him, but the eleven have been obedient; they have listened to his words and have believed in his divine origin; they have had faith in his mission, in his role of Messiah (John xvii, 6-8). "They are mine, therefore they are thine, and I am glorified in them" (9, 10). "When I am gone they will be alone, do not thou abandon them! Holy Father, keep them in thy name whom thou hast given me, that they may be one as we also are . . . that they may have my joy filled in themselves" (11-13). Yet one more plea does he make for his beloved apostles. "The world hath hated them, because they are not of the world, as I also am not of the world (xvii, 14); sanctify them in truth." For they also have a great mission: "As thou hast sent me into the world, I also have sent them into the world.

And for them do I sanctify myself, that they also may be sanctified in truth" (18-19).

Thus did Jesus pray for himself and for those whom he loved most in the world. How ardent, how loving, how confident, and how holy is his prayer! It has but one end in view, the glory of God and the sanctification of souls. Let us learn to pray like him, and our prayers will then be perfect.

5. *How prayers vary in value.*

The value of any prayer depends on the amount of confidence, humility, and love which characterize it, and its efficacy is in proportion to its value. He who prays draws from the ocean of heavenly treasure; some draw only with a nutshell, others with vessels of varying size, large or small. Ordinary Christians pray seldom and with but little love; the pious pray better and more efficaciously; their prayers avail according to the degree of their detachment and of their charity. The perfect are those who have struggled long and valiantly to attain the gift of prayer. For years they have endeavoured to practise perfect recollection, invoking thereto the assistance of their guardian angel and of their heavenly protectors. God has at length blessed their perseverance, and they are now able to pray so constantly and so lovingly that they win for themselves and others an outpouring of divine grace.

Only those who are submissive to the action of the Holy Spirit have this true love of prayer, and it is their works alone which bear fruit. When the apostles found that exterior works were unduly absorbing their time, they delegated these to the deacons, that they might consecrate themselves to prayer: "But we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word" (Acts vi, 4). "True missionaries," said St Vincent de Paul, "should resemble Cistercians in their own houses and the apostles outside" (*Life*, by Abelly, i, p. 89). Captain Marceau, who devoted himself most zealously and generously to the work of the missions,

deplored the fact that many missionaries gave more time to exterior works than to prayer. "In general," he said, "they do not pray enough."

Of Father Marie-Antoine, a saint of Toulouse (1907), his biographer writes: "He was the busiest of all the religious, the one most resorted to by others, yet of them all he gave the most time to prayer" (Third Part, ch. i). St Francis de Sales, who also led a very active life, found time to make an hour's meditation every morning, and in the evening he gave an hour to the saying of his rosary. During the day he spent in prayer every moment he could snatch from his work, and he often curtailed his hours of sleep in order to pray more (*Life*, by Hamon, ii, p. 360).

Thus have acted all the great servants of God, of whom it may be said, "they went about doing good." No one, then, can legitimately plead lack of time as an excuse for lack of prayer. Those who love to pray find time to pray. They will borrow it from the hours which others spend in worldly occupations.

People who allow their minds to be overwhelmed with personal cares and anxieties will be unable to pray; and even if they make the effort, they are so distracted with their dreams, hopes, fears, and calculations that they do but waste their time. Those, on the other hand, who place all their confidence in God; and who, living only for him, abandon their reputation, their health, and their happiness to his care, know the joy of the heart uplifted in perpetual communion with God. The former prefer companionship and conversation to recollection; the latter love the silence and solitude in which they find their God. For such, prayer is a necessity; their one desire is to pour out their heart to God, to tell him of their love, to commend their interests, their friends, and their family to his care. As they go about their daily duties they make use of any spare moment to lift up their heart to God and to implore his graces. How powerful are the prayers of such people, how fruitful their lives! Neither they themselves, nor their nearest friends, know the good they do, for the influence of prayer is intangible and

imperceptible, extending far beyond the sphere of our words or actions. Not until eternity, when all is revealed, will the elect realize the infinite amount of good wrought by men of prayer, and the glory and happiness that have been merited by them.

CHAPTER XVII

MENTAL PRAYER

1. *Prayer an essential of true piety.*

In a letter written to her venerable confessor, Don Alphonsus Velasquez, Bishop of Osma, St Teresa makes known to him what the Lord had revealed to her in his regard. She says: "Although I am always instant in prayer for you, the command you recently gave me has increased my fervour. . . . I have begged from God the graces with which I know he has supplied you, in giving you humility, charity, and indefatigable zeal for his glory and for the salvation of souls; but he revealed to me that there was lacking in you one of the chief virtues, that which is the foundation of all others, and you know that when the foundation is inadequate the building will soon collapse. That which you lack is prayer, lit by the burning lamp of the light of faith; and to persevere in prayer with the strength given by the Holy Spirit for the accomplishment of his union with the soul, for without this union the soul will be dry and barren" (May, 1581). Our Lord thus reveals to us, through St Teresa, that prayer is the foundation of all the virtues; without it piety will be but superficial. All the saints have proclaimed their ardent conviction of the necessity of prayer, and have extolled its benefits with enthusiasm. "What the sword is to the soldier," says St Vincent de Paul, "prayer is to the priest" (*Life*, by Abelly, i-ii, ch. v). And again: "You can expect no good from a man who does not love to hold converse with God" (i-iii, ch. vi). He affirmed that his congregation would last as long as the exercise of prayer was faithfully practised therein, because prayer is as an impregnable rampart, protecting the missionary from all attacks,—a mystical arsenal, furnishing him with the necessary arms, not

only for his own defence, but also for the confounding of the enemies of God and of the soul (*ibid*, ch. vii). It was the custom of M. Olier to give an hour to meditation every morning and the same in the evening. "By the grace of God," he said, "I have never, under any circumstances, omitted my morning hour of prayer" (*Life*, by Faillon, part i, bk. vi). St Alphonsus recommended every priest to make an hour's meditation daily, in order to increase in fervour and recollection (*Life*, by Berthe, Part I, ch. v). His rule for his religious prescribed three hours of prayer each day. "I shall not mind," said he, "if you take time from your studies to give to prayer, for we have more need of sanctity than of science" (i-iii, ch. iv). And again: "The more progress we make in prayer, the holier we shall become" (*ibid.*, ch. xv).

Is vocal prayer, then, not sufficient? It may be for personal salvation, or for the practice of the ordinary virtues, and many good Christians are satisfied with it; but it will not suffice for those who wish so to advance in piety and virtue as to become capable of doing good to other souls. Neither will it avail to bring the soul into that intimate and constant union with God which is necessary to perfection.

They whose vocation calls them to the practice of more than ordinary virtue; who would keep the promises and fulfil the duties of the sacerdotal state; religious who would be faithful to their vows; and even the secular Christian who aspires to solid piety and to lead a life of good works;—all these must give themselves up to prayer. If we would make progress in the spiritual life, we must develop our faith and nourish our hope by pious meditation. And especially must we be diligent in the exercise of love. Those who seldom reflect on the great truths cannot be vividly impressed by them; those who do not meditate on the marvellous love of God as shown in his gifts; who are satisfied, when they approach him, with reciting formulas composed by others instead of speaking to him from their own heart, will never attain to ardent charity. Do we not all know people who endlessly

recite long, formal prayers, and yet remain of quite ordinary virtue? "When you pray," said Jesus to his disciples, "speak not much, as the heathen, for they think that in their much speaking they may be heard" (Matt. vi, 7).

Vocal prayer will not avail to enlighten those who make it unless it be accompanied by mental prayer; it is the latter which illumines the soul and transfigures it. After his colloquies with God, Moses' face shone so brightly that the Jews dared not look upon it. The face of Jesus was radiant as he prayed upon Mount Thabor. If souls could become visible, how dazzling would appear those fervent and generous ones who, in prayer, enter into true communion with God, between whom and the illumination of his splendour there intervenes no shadow of self-love, no cloud of frivolous and vain thoughts and desires. When such clouds are scattered, and the soul gives itself wholly to God, it will receive from him the holy lights of faith and pure love, and will by him be set on fire and transfigured.

2. *The nature and degrees of prayer.*

What exactly is this mental prayer so warmly advocated by the saints and doctors of the Church? "Mental prayer," says St Thomas in the Prologue of his *Commentary on the Psalms*, "is the lifting up of the soul to God. There are four ways," he continues, "by which a soul may practise this: by admiring the greatness of his power, which is faith; by aspiring to eternal beatitude, which is hope; by seeking union with his goodness and sanctity, which is charity; and by imitating his works, which is the lifting up by righteousness. To sum up, prayer is thus shown to be an ascending of the soul to God by faith, hope, and love."

St Francis de Sales tells us in his *Love of God* (vi, 1) that "St Gregory of Nyssa accurately defined prayer when he taught that it was converse between the soul and God; so also did St John Chrysostom, in describing prayer as a familiar talk with the divine Majesty; and equally St Augustine and St John Damascene, who

called it a lifting up of the mind and heart to God. In prayer, then, we speak to God, and he to us. We aspire to him, and enter into him, while he inspires and enters into us." Again, this holy doctor shows prayer to be the exercise of affective love. "This love fills us with delight, with goodwill, with elation, and with spiritual desires. It inspires more emotions in us than we are able to describe" (*ibid.*).

The holy doctors are thus seen to regard mental prayer as an exercise of faith, hope, and love, but more particularly of love; the purer and stronger our love, the more powerful will be our prayer. We should meditate, not only to excite ourselves to do good or to obtain grace, but still more that we may gain the guidance of love.

All Christian souls, however, do not love to the same extent. Servants and children both love the head of the family, but their love is shown in different ways. Beginners may indeed possess in some degree the virtue of charity, but how dissimilar will be its action in them and in the perfect! Suarez emphasizes this in his summary of "The Whole School," saying that "The holy exercise of mental prayer cannot be the same in any two persons, seeing that none are alike in disposition or in love. The degrees and methods of prayer will therefore vary according to the interior condition of those who pray, the three different methods of mental prayer being the equivalent of the three stages through which men pass" (*De devotione*, xi, 3).

The first stage is that of an ordinary Christian soul, one who, though hardly yet pious, believes in the truths of faith, but without thinking much about them or trying to fathom them. Such have, perhaps, to struggle with their passions, they sustain many failures, and find prayer difficult; their love is too weak to keep them in constant union with God and they require that their minds be stored with the holy teachings of the faith; spiritual reading will be of great help to them, and they will find much to interest them therein. A methodical procedure will often help those at this stage to keep their thoughts from wandering, and to fix their atten-

tion; practices such as the composition of place, which is an imaginary representation of a mystery, or of a deed on which to meditate, will prove useful to them. Persons who are in this first degree of the spiritual life, though they may sincerely desire to live according to the laws of God, have as yet little longing for progress; but the motives and thoughts which reading and meditation will present to them will eventually give rise to such a desire. They should then at once express it to our Lord, and ask him for light and strength to enable them to make strong and definite resolutions.

The soul that has attained to piety will experience a sincere desire for progress; but this desire needs to be encouraged, for it is easily stifled by worldly cares and distractions. Even a pious Christian often lacks the courage to make sacrifices, and to this end he needs to meditate frequently on the beauty of virtue, the benefits of fervour, and the duty of gratitude and love towards God. Especially must such a one supplicate God in prayer for the gifts of the fundamental virtues. This prayer will differ from that of beginners in being sweeter, easier, and more affective, and he will find far greater pleasure therein. The love of God for souls is now his incentive, and has become for him a personal reality. Imagery and reflections no longer appeal to him; they are even distasteful. He leaves them at once for the prayer of petition, and here he feels at home. The further such Christians advance in piety, the more ardent becomes their desire for humility and renunciation; they bewail their own worthlessness, they protest their love, and their petitions become more ardent. Love, increasing in intensity, leads them to pray more with the heart than with the mind; there will be fewer reflections in such prayer, but far more love.

We have described in preceding chapters the momentous change worked in the faithful soul by the generous practice of recollection, mortification, and renunciation. Acts of detachment, of confidence in God, and of perfect abandonment, will have greatly diminished the natural anxieties and interests which at first so distract the mind and interfere with the practice

of the interior life. By the exercise of the above virtues the soul has suppressed the obstacles to the exercise of the gifts of the Holy Ghost, and the Divine Spirit, finding it thus ready and thirsting for his graces, pours precious lights into the mind and imbues the will with a deeper, purer, and more stable love. He seldom acts now on the sensible faculties or on the emotions; his work is performed in the higher regions of the intelligence and the will, to which he imparts an exalted but general and indistinct idea of the incomprehensible and ineffable loveliness of God, and confirms the will in the constant union of love with him. Hitherto such a one has incited himself to acts of love; he now does this no longer, but only prepares his mind, emptying it of worldly distractions, and fixing all his thoughts on the goodness of God; then, by the action of the Holy Ghost, the love of God awakes in him, penetrates him, and lifts him up into intimate communion with the Beloved. This consummation of love is generally peaceful and quiet, but sometimes it breaks forth in an ardour of longing for an increase of love and for a still more perfect union; or, again, with a burning desire that God should be known and loved, the soul fervently prays for his glory.

The prayer of souls who have attained to pure love differs greatly from the meditation of beginners, and from the affective prayer of the pious; for in the latter the soul manifests much activity, while in the prayer of loving union, which is the work of the Holy Ghost, it receives rather than acts.

This prayer of loving union follows regularly on meditation and affective prayer. "Meditation," says Bossuet, "is good in its place, and useful at the beginning of the spiritual life, but we must not stop there, for the soul which faithfully practises mortification and recollection becomes capable of a purer and more intimate mental prayer, which consists in the simple and loving contemplation of a divine object."

3. *Practical rules common to all prayer: preparation and the struggle against distractions.*

There are certain practical rules which are common to all the different stages of prayer, and others which are peculiar to each. The following are common to all: to prepare oneself before praying; to struggle energetically against any distractions which may assail us; if afflicted with aridity, to be resigned, but still to continue to seek the God who is hidden from us; and finally, always to endeavour to love him.

The best preparation for prayer is to lead a holy life. It is not the highly intelligent, whose minds abound in beautiful thoughts, nor yet the people with the liveliest emotions who succeed in making the best prayers; it is those who generously practise renunciation and self-mortification. These show greater love, for our self-denial is the measure of our love. For such as these the hours passed in the company of their Beloved are the happiest and best spent of the day. But in this world we, one and all, even those whose hearts are filled with divine love, have business to transact and duties to perform, duties which, by permission of divine Providence, are often a source of trouble and anxiety to us, or even of distress, so that worldly thoughts perforce usurp our minds. In order, therefore, to achieve union with God under these conditions, a strong act of recollection must be made. God is here; he regards me, he loves me! These are the facts that we must first let sink into our minds. Neglect of this duty of preparation is one of the chief causes of failure in mental prayer. We make too little effort to realize the presence of God; and for recollection, as for other duties, the reward is always in proportion to the endeavour.

But if effort is essential to union with God, so also is prayer, for, this being a supernatural work, grace is required for its achievement, and our petition must go up: *Domine, doce nos orare* ("Lord, teach us to

pray"). It is well also to invoke the saints, our guardian angel, and the Blessed Virgin, that they may obtain for us this precious grace of fervent prayer, prayer by which God may be glorified, Jesus consoled, Mary and the saints gladdened, suffering souls relieved, sinners converted, and we ourselves and all whom we love obtain the grace of God. To all who pray with these holy intentions abundant grace will be given to assist them in their prayers.

The soul that endeavours to live in a constant state of recollection usually finds a sweet facility in conversing with God; but even to such a one distractions will sometimes occur which will render prayer difficult. However, a prayer that is a constant struggle against such distractions, and a laborious effort to draw near to God, is a very meritorious one; it may bring no sweetness to the struggler, but it is eminently pleasing to God. Our Lord looks lovingly on the poor soul who valiantly sustains such bitter attacks. It is love which inspires it, and the fruit of such laborious prayers is far greater than the tired fighter in the thick of the battle can realize.

Distractions which are caused by purely natural anxieties, or by sheer self-love, must be uncompromisingly repelled; in their presence we must strive for a more complete detachment, and reiterate our protestations of conformity to the divine Will. But with regard to more legitimate preoccupations, the question arises: Is it permissible to speak of them to our Lord, and to make them the subject of prayer? It is certainly right to recommend to God the persons who are the cause of these cares, and also any works which have his glory for their aim. But we should do this confidently and briefly, submitting our anxieties to the care of divine Providence. They will then cease to trouble us; we shall rise above the things of this world to the Heart of God; and there, meditating on his wisdom and his goodness, we shall be united to him in love.

Distractions are more to be feared when we are in a state of aridity. The felt presence of the Lord in the heart will always drive away unworthy thoughts; but

when God hides himself and the soul is cold and dry, the struggle is indeed a hard one.

Aridity is designed by God either as a trial or as a punishment,—a trial for just souls, a punishment for the careless, the unmortified, and the uncharitable. What ever the cause, it should be accepted with submission, but never with indifference.

One morning at Capharnaum the apostles and the multitude, perceiving that Jesus had disappeared, began to search for him; but with very unequal ardour. Peter knew best where to look, and he was the first to find him (Mark i, 37). When Jesus hides all seek him; but alas! they do not all seek eagerly, and some indolent souls make no real effort to find him. Jesus greatly desires to be sought. He made as if he would leave the disciples at Emmaus, and if they had not begged him to remain he would have gone away.

People who are in the habit of using a book when at prayer should, when their hearts are cold, re-read some of the sentences to revive their good dispositions. Those who go directly to God can employ other means. Gemma Galgani said that when Jesus hid from her she used to recite some verses of the psalms which she had learned. Some utter ejaculatory prayers; others will kiss their crucifix or press it to their hearts; others, again, repeat the first petitions of the "Our Father," or recite some other prayer slowly, stopping to meditate after each phrase; or they supplicate the Lord for the salvation of departing souls.

Souls that live in true union with God will, even when distracted and preoccupied, unconsciously continue in the dispositions that have been instilled into them by the Holy Spirit. In agreement with these dispositions, they will make acts which will help them in their struggles; acts of praise and adoration of the perfection of God; of gratitude to him, and of self-humiliation; of intercession for themselves and for the guilty world; above all, they will practise love of God; either in its pure simplicity, desiring to love him more; or in conformity, embracing the divine Will with all their heart; or in zeal, longing for God to be better known, served, and loved.

Each will feel some special attraction which he should follow; some prayer will best suit his needs, and this he must recognize and use. Jesus will ever give himself to those who thus seek him with their whole heart.

The essence of all prayer, no matter to what degree of it we have attained, is an outpouring of ourselves in love. It is the trysting-place of the soul with God, a meeting with our tenderest friend. They are to be pitied whose prayer is not inspired by love.

The first duty, then, of every prayerful Christian is to stir up his love. It is more profitable to meditate on the love and goodness of God, and on his wondrous gifts, than on his severity or on the terrors of death and hell; the thought of his love gives us a clearer understanding of the heinousness of sin and the justice of its punishment; the heart will then feel deeper contrition, the resolutions will be strengthened, and petitions will become more confiding and more ardent. That is indeed a good prayer in which we are overwhelmed by the thought of the love of God.

When you kneel to pray, O faithful soul, remind yourself first and always of the love of Jesus. He loved you before you were born. He loves you now, and overwhelms you with his graces, and he will love you to all eternity. Yes, he loved you before your birth. Behold him in his crib, apparently powerless, but even there thinking of you, looking at you, stretching out his tiny arms to you. Even of his sleep he says: "I sleep, but my Heart watches." Consider how he toiled in order that he might leave you the example of a life of labour, privation, and devotion. See how, during his public life, he made himself all things to all men, seeking out the sorrowful, relieving the unfortunate, healing, instructing, exhorting, and comforting. In his holy humility he even stooped to wash the feet of the apostles. Picture to yourself the gentle Saviour, girt with a towel, a basin of water at hand, bending to wash the dust-covered feet of Peter and his companions; yea, even those of Judas, who had already betrayed him. No one fears him; all are at ease in his presence, for

he is so good, so gentle, so full of compassion and indulgence.

Now, as then, he is affectionate, gentle, and encouraging. Still he proclaims: "Come to me, all you that labour and are burdened, and I will refresh you." How often you have hurt him! You have indeed room for repentance; but never let the remembrance of your unfaithfulness keep you from turning to him with ardent confidence and filial familiarity. Did this sweet Jesus ever rebuke a sinner? Remember the kindness and compassion which he showed to the Samaritan woman taken in adultery, to Zacchæus, and to Magdalen, and his forgiveness of the penitent thief. Even the shameless, ignoble Judas who betrayed him he received kindly and tenderly, endeavouring at the last moment to win him back with the words: "Friend, wherefore art thou come?" On the cross he prayed for his cruel executioners, and "in heaven," St Paul tells us, "he is always living to make intercession for us, for them that come to God by him" (Heb. vii, 25). St John, too, teaches that in heaven he is become our advocate, pleading even the cause of those who offend him. Could you, then, imagine him regarding you with displeasure? Not if you realize the depth of his love and the goodness of his heart; it is ever overflowing with tenderness for you, and because he loves you he longs to have you near him. He will bend towards you at your approach, and will say, with his unvarying loving-kindness: "My beloved, why are you here? What have you to tell me? What do you ask of me?" Answer him then: "I come to love you, to acknowledge my failings and my faults. I come that you may strengthen me and make me more faithful." You must have confidence, perfect confidence in him. You may be familiar with him; it is the confiding, the simple, the generous and self-forgetful who most quickly reach his Presence.

But let not his goodness hide from you his greatness. It is the Omnipotent who thus humbles himself. Out of nothing, without effort, he can create not only that marvel, the grain of sand, but also works of incompar-

able beauty, worlds larger than ours, angels more perfect than the seraphim. He is essential, unchangeable Peace; he never deviates from his tranquillity, and, himself immovable, he sets all things in motion. He is the Omniscient; under his gaze at this moment lie all things—the Past, the Present, and the Future. He is the Infinite, greater than all the worlds. He is the Eternal; centuries are less in his unending life than a drop of water in the ocean. He is the All-beautiful, the Infinite Majesty, he is also the All-good, and the love which moved him to empty himself, to suffer, and to die, is equalled only by his might.

But how describe him? How analyze the Indivisible? All perfections meet in him, for he is always and essentially One. Not to him may we assign qualities—power, wisdom, justice, mercy—for he himself *is* all these, and is yet greater and more than they all. He is the Inexplicable, the Incomprehensible! He is he who Is, the I Am.

4. *Rules peculiar to different stages of prayer: the prayer of loving union.*

We have shown that there are diverse methods of prayer, according to the degrees of virtue and the differing dispositions of souls. The rules proper to each of these modes of prayer may easily be deduced from what has gone before.

When a Christian still engaged in the struggle against his passions, and lacking in spiritual ardour, essays to meditate, he would do well to follow a method and to use a book; otherwise he runs a risk of wasting his time in reveries. He must endeavour to realize the blessings of virtue and the evils entailed by sin, and he must study the great truths: *Memorare novissima tua et in aeternum non peccabis.* He should also be penetrated with the thought of the infinite mercies and patience of God, for such a one needs, above all things, an increase of confidence, without which he is at the mercy of the enemy. Beginners must remember that reflection is not the whole of prayer; it is only a means

of inspiring us to make resolutions, and so leading us on to the communion with God which should occupy the greater part of our meditation.

Pious souls will have less need of methods and of books. Such restrictions would be unpalatable to them, and they should have recourse to them only if they find them profitable. The fundamental virtues—humility, mortification, renunciation, patience, and charity—must be their study, and they should contemplate these in our Lord, fervently begging the gift of them from him.

When souls, inspired by the Holy Spirit, feel grace and love awakening in them, they must rise above creatures to the supreme union with the ineffable and mysterious God.

Then can they cry: "He is in me, and I in him; immersed in his divinity, I am one with him! I love him! I love him!"

Conformed thus to God's will, let them maintain a simple and tranquil union with him.

The principles just stated give the answer to a question much debated in the past, but on which to-day all seem to agree. A few years ago fervent advocates of methodical meditation insisted that it should never be abandoned. "Being good in itself," they said, "restriction to it cannot harm any soul; and it is a sure protection against spiritual sloth, presumption, illusion, and many other dangers."

These dangers certainly exist, and must be guarded against—the rules that we have just laid down provide a means for this,—but there is a contrary danger, and a very fatal one, notwithstanding the assertion that he who prevents the faithful soul from laying aside methodical meditation does it no harm.

Prayer, as we have seen, should be chiefly an exercise of love, and the perfect love is that which is breathed directly into the soul by God. Reasoning is not love; the work of the imagination is not love; the composition of place is not love; spiritual reading may help to fix the attention and prevent distractions, but to make any of these the foundation of prayer would be to hinder the working of grace and the growth of love. When

the Holy Spirit begins his wondrous work in the soul, it should know how to prepare itself for his operations, that it may not obstruct them by natural activity. Experience shows that those who have not been taught this lesson are prone to interfere with the divine action in their souls, and so never enter fully upon this way of simplicity, this calm and strong union of love to which they have been called.

It may be asked: "Is, then, the Holy Spirit dependent on his creatures? Is it not rather the creature that depends on him, and is incapable of resisting his impulses?" The Holy Spirit does indeed exercise a powerful and irresistible impulse; he can, and sometimes does, draw the soul away from reasoning and method, but this is an exceptional proceeding. The ordinary way of Providence is to respect human liberty. God invites; he does not force or constrain; the soul must prepare itself. *Ante orationem praepara animam tuam et noli esse quasi homo qui tentat Deum* ("Before prayer prepare thy soul, and be not as one who tempts God"). You are absorbed by preoccupations, and with your mind full of idle thoughts you kneel to pray. God could drive away your distractions, but he will not do so; you yourself must repulse them and strive for recollection. Or perhaps when praying, instead of lifting up your heart to God in love, and subduing your soul in order to enjoy him peacefully, you endeavour to recite long formulas, or you read the thoughts of others from a book. God could detach you from these methods, but this is not according to his plan, and you lose the great gain of the union of love to which he invites you.

This is the reason why St Teresa, St John of the Cross, and St Jane de Chantal complained so bitterly of directors who, in endeavouring to confine souls to meditation, closed to them the way of union with God, and frustrated his designs.

All fervent Christians should aspire to the prayer of loving union; but they must not devote themselves to it until God gives them the grace which renders meditation painful and leads them to find their deepest satisfaction in being alone with him, absorbed in love of him. The

soul then co-operates in the action of grace, not by the exercise of its faculties, but by joyously offering them up to the divine Spirit, who enlightens the mind and directs and inflames the will, diffusing light and love. It is no longer then the soul that prays; but, "the Spirit himself asketh for us with unspeakable groanings" (Rom. viii, 26).

Should then those in this state of union, whether sensible or arid, omit to petition graces from God? Certainly not, even though this union may of itself win such graces; for souls united to God desire them, both for themselves, that they may serve him better, and also for others; they offer to God all their acts of love, all their works, sacrifices, and praises, in order to obtain these graces; God himself shares their desire, and he never fails to bless these children of his love and all who belong to them.

Souls in union with God are not always immersed in loving silence; they are often uplifted in ardent prayer to heaven, especially when they realize their own unworthiness, or suffer for the sins of those dear to them. Even during such prayers, however, they find comfort in regarding God and loving him. "Listen, my Jesus," said Gemma Galgani one day in ecstasy. "Listen to the question of my confessor. 'When you are before Jesus, Gemma, what do you do?' 'What do I do? If I am with Jesus crucified, I suffer. If I am with Jesus in the Host, I love.'"

Such a prayer as this is an outpouring of love which no words can describe. We weary of words, and we feel that the sincerity of silent adoration and the gaze of love express more, and give our Lord more pleasure, than all recited prayers or spoken protestations.

The love infused by the Holy Spirit is not always sweet to the soul; it is often arid. The will is not then inflamed, but it still maintains a constant union with the divine Will; it desires only what God wills, and all that he wills. This is not an acquired disposition; it is a gift from God, and happy is the soul that receives it. "Then," says St Francis de Sales, "the soul neither hears nor speaks to her Beloved, nor does she feel any

sensible sign of his presence; she only knows that she is in the Presence of the God who loves her. The will acts only by simple acquiescence in the divine good pleasure, desiring to pray only in order to be in God's sight and be pleasing to him" (*Love of God*, vi, 7). The Christian who is thus united in will to God need not be disturbed if his mind wander. His meritorious attitude of faith and love can be maintained despite the vagaries of his imagination. And it is not only to mental prayer that this principle applies, for the value of all our prayers lies in the love which is steadfastly, though at times imperceptibly, maintained by the will. This love exists independently of words, and involuntary distractions do not lessen its value.

How blessed is the soul who has received from God this gift of loving union, and who, thanks to fidelity and perfect detachment, feels it ever increase. It is not only in prayer that it is united with God; all through the day, in the midst of occupations and work, it draws from his presence the power it needs for the accomplishment of the duties of life. *Qui adhaeret Domino unus spiritus est* ("He who is joined to the Lord is one spirit") (1 Cor. vi, 17). Such as these, united to God, are one with him in mind, heart, and will. They are his instruments; it is no longer they who live, but God who lives in them. He acts through them, and, finding them thus surrendered to his will, accomplishes in them and by them his loving designs.

PART III

THE PERFECT VIRTUES

CHAPTER XVIII

THE VIRTUE OF FAITH

1. *Trials and degrees of faith.*

The friends of God should live in intimate union with him. Such union is both his desire and their own, but it can only be effected by the action of the three great virtues which direct the soul to God, and which for this reason are called the theological or divine virtues—Faith, Hope, and Charity.

These virtues are too little appreciated, because, alas! man knows far less of his duty to God than of his duty to his neighbour. People will say: "I have neither killed nor stolen, therefore I have nothing with which to reproach myself"; and all the time they are lacking in faith, hope, and the love of God.

Even religious people often seem to prize more highly the possession of such natural qualities as kindness, gentleness, and evenness of temper than they do sound faith, ardent hope, and fervent charity. Nevertheless, the theological virtues are as far above the natural as God is above man; and whatever there is of good in our performance of our duty toward our neighbour is according to the measure of our possession of these virtues.

Faith must first reign in the soul, for it is the foundation of the supernatural order, and the whole edifice must be built upon it. A building cannot extend beyond its foundations, therefore all the other supernatural virtues depend upon faith.

Let us, then, strive for a firm faith. Superficial minds

incline to imagine that all good Christians possess an equal degree of faith. This is a great mistake. Even among priests and religious, faith varies immensely in purity and intensity, and therefore in power and in its influence over the conduct of life.

The best way of increasing our faith is to bear bravely the trials sent us by Providence, to make acts of faith and to live by faith.

Faith is the highest honour we can render to divine truth. It is also a debt we owe to God; he has a right to expect implicit trust in his word, and we should give proof of this trust when he tries our faith. Such tests are the law of life; they strengthen the virtue which is tested and add lustre to it; above all, they are occasions for glorifying and rendering homage to God.

St Paul, in his epistle to the Hebrews, extols the faith of the great men of the Old Testament, and shows it to have been the foundation of all their virtues and their mighty works. In every case where their faith was put to the test it triumphed. By faith Noah believed the Lord's warning of the deluge he would send, though there was then no sign of it, and he built the ark in spite of the mockery of men. By faith Abraham, when called by God, left his country; by faith he believed in the promise of a son when he and his wife had ceased to hope for one; and with heroic faith he was even ready, in obedience to the Lord's command, to sacrifice that only son. All the patriarchs, prophets, martyrs, and heroes of the Old Testament were subjected to severe trials, from which by faith they emerged victorious, whilst those around them failed in the test.

When Jesus came preaching the Gospel, he gave overwhelming proofs of his divine mission, both by the sublimity of his doctrine, the holiness of his life, and the wonder of his miracles. Many believed in him, but he would put their faith to the test, and in the synagogue at Capharnaum, to the same men whom he had the day before fed miraculously with five barley loaves and two small fishes, he propounded the mystery of the Eucharist. He announced it in mysterious words and gave no explanation; he asked for blind confidence and

perfect faith. Alas! a great number, and among them one of the apostles, Judas, failed under this test; but the faith of those who trusted in their Lord was increased and strengthened. The shameful death of Jesus on the cross was another test for his disciples. It continued to be so even after his resurrection; for the apostles preached that he who had been condemned and crucified on Calvary was the Messias, the Son of God, who by his death had redeemed the world. This preaching seemed, as says St Paul, folly to the pagans and a scandal to the Jews, but it was confirmed by many miracles. Then, as now, were given to faith both its helps and its hindrances; tests are always imposed under which some are found faithful and others fail.

Still to-day, and to all alike, the trials of faith, when bravely borne, bring an added strength and enlightenment; but if badly accepted they hinder and stifle its growth.

A clinging to our own judgement and a trusting in our own wisdom are great obstacles to faith. A mind in such a condition will only admit of a purely natural interpretation of the affairs of life, attributing practically nothing to the action of God.

Another obstacle to faith proceeds from the repugnance felt by the will for that pure doctrine of the Gospel which declares renunciation to be necessary for the perfect practice of virtue. This law of renunciation is indeed a hard one. Human nature cannot endure it, so, unwilling to admit itself cowardly and unfaithful, it seeks excuses for avoiding the sacrifices demanded, and the reasons it advances are always contrary to the teachings of faith. In face of this temptation a man will adopt one of two courses; either he abandons himself to his faults, rejecting the light because it condemns him, "For every one that doeth evil hateth the light and cometh not to the light, that his works may not be reproved" (John iii, 20), or he will choose duty by a meritorious act of faith, which faith will then become for him a living light, "He that doeth truth cometh to the light" (*ibid.*, 21).

And according to our advance in well-doing will be

our knowledge of the truth. There is as close a connection between the true, the beautiful, and the good, as between the false, the ugly, and the bad. We are guided by the truth when our actions are good, and we also gain a better understanding of the truth. Falsity leads us into error, and the longer we deceive ourselves, the blinder we shall become.

God withdraws his lights from those who abuse them. This is, on his part, an act both of justice and of mercy, for the abuse of these lights would but increase the guilt of the rebellious sinner. The miracles of our blessed Lord served only to harden still further the hearts of the incredulous Jews; "He who opened the eyes of the man born blind," said they of Bethany, "could he not have prevented the death of his friend?" Miserable men who could use so wonderful a deed as an excuse for murmuring! When our Lord restored Lazarus again to life, their fury increased, and they resolved on his death, "What do we, for this man doth many miracles? . . . From that day therefore they devised to put him to death" (John xi, 47, 53). The miracle which strengthened and increased the faith of the disciples only incited the enemies of Jesus to a blinder and more culpable unbelief.

To Jesus' entreaty to his eternal Father, "Father, glorify thy name," the Father responded, "I have both glorified it and will glorify it again" (John xii, 28). Many of those present heard only an indeterminate sound; "It is a clap of thunder," they said. These were undoubtedly the most hardened; some heard a voice without distinguishing the words; others said, "An angel spoke to him." The apostles heard the words distinctly, because their hearts were better disposed. Thus do we see that comprehension of the word of God and of his doctrine depends on the state of soul of those who hear, and that faith varies, not in accordance with the exterior manifestation of supernatural truths, but with the interior dispositions of those to whom these truths are presented; "If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God," said our Lord (John vii, 17).

2. Faith grows with love.

As goodwill is a source of faith, it follows that the more upright the will, the more attached to duty and conformed to the divine will, the more enlightened will be the faith. Even sinners who will to keep their faith will keep it. He who resolutely wills to refrain from mortal sin possesses a true estimate of the gravity of sin; he who sets his will against the commission of even venial sin is still more enlightened. What strong faith, then, will be theirs who, having entirely renounced their own will and subjected it to the divine Will, resolve to deny self in all things, and to seek only the good pleasure of God. The following point cannot be too strongly stressed: the divine truths which God propounds take root in the human soul according to the manner of their reception, whether it be one of love, of indifference, or of aversion. There are souls, alas! who have a hatred of the truth; to such as these Jesus says: "My word hath no place in you. You hear me not, because you are not of God" (John viii, 37, 47); "You are of your father the devil" (*ibid.*, 44). A soul sunk in sin, loving and desiring only sin, will be in stubborn opposition to the God who is the enemy of sin; it will hate his teaching and the truths which he proclaims.

Others do not hate the truth, but are simply indifferent to it. Such was Pilate. Jesus said: "Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice." "What is truth?" said Pilate, and without even awaiting a reply he went away. Truth mattered nothing to this egoist, indifferent to all but his own interests.

These, then, are the main causes of unbelief: either a hatred of the good and the true, or a disdainful indifference to it,—sentiments ever to be found in hearts that know not the love of God.

Believers, on the contrary, always feel an attraction for what is good and true, because they are at least learning to love God. Our Lord says: "He that is of God heareth the words of God" (John viii, 47). Those

who already experience a filial affection and reverence for God accept the truths he reveals, as a loving child would accept the words of a venerated father or a devoted mother. We are always inclined to doubt a person whom we dislike, but to those whom we love we listen eagerly, and are ready to adopt their ideas and to profit by their prudence and wisdom. More potently than any human love does the love of God inspire us to seek his teaching, to taste and enjoy his doctrine. Faith grows, therefore, with the growth of divine love in the human soul.

The object of our faith is God in all his perfection, as manifested in the designs of his ever-wise and loving Providence. It is love which reveals his qualities to us; the more we love, the firmer becomes our faith in his greatness, his power, his goodness, and his ineffable tenderness. Love blinds our vision only when its object is an imperfect human creature; then indeed it disguises his faults and leads us to exaggerate his virtues; but love for the saints only enlightens us as to their admirable qualities; and still more is this the case with our love for God, whose perfection it is impossible to exaggerate. St John knew our Lord far better than did Judas, Mary better than St John.

It is not only because love disposes them to believe marvellous things of God that generous and saintly souls possess a clearer knowledge of him than do the imperfect; it is also because God, seeing them so desirous of knowing him, so happy in adoring him, bestows upon them still greater lights, which reveal to them more clearly the perfections of their Beloved. To souls of ordinary virtue God vouchsafes only the lights of thought and reason, but holy souls receive, independently of their own efforts, far more precious lights and fruitful inspirations; they are marvellously enlightened upon the incomprehensible perfections of God, and they have a supremely exalted idea of him, though it is one which they find hard to formulate. They comprehend, albeit inarticulately, the greatness and goodness of God, his holiness, his horror of sin, the heinousness of offending him, the vanity of all

created things and the value of the heavenly, and above all there is revealed to them the bliss that awaits them—of beholding God face to face and loving him for all eternity. They apprehend also the beauty, the value, and the compass of the various virtues, the importance of recollection, the necessity and the benefits of penance, the depth and the sweetness of humility, and the tenderness of brotherly love. They alone can rightly appreciate the happenings of life, and can trace in them the steadfast, loving hand of Providence. They reverence and love the Will of God, for they recognize more clearly than any others how wise, how holy, how good and loving is this divine Will; and even if they cannot account for all that takes place in the world, they never forget that this great God, whom they reverence, controls all; so they submit to his decrees and are at peace. "I will not now call you servants," said Jesus to his apostles, "for the servant knoweth not what his lord doth. But I have called you friends: because all things, whatsoever I have heard of my Father, I have made known to you" (John xv, 15). All generous souls are the friends of Jesus, and the divine Master communicates his lights to them.

3. *The benefits of perfect faith.*

We have outlined above some of the marvellous effects produced by the operation of faith in perfect souls. The province of this virtue is to unite us to God, who is infinite Truth, to make our finite minds one with the infinite Mind, so that we may think as God thinks and judge as he judges. God has revealed himself to men solely in order to teach them the beautiful, holy, life-giving truths which have been his from all eternity. By believing in them through his word we participate in his knowledge and in his wisdom. Therefore the soul into whom God has poured the light of faith will be able to penetrate more deeply into the knowledge of truth, and participate more abundantly in the divine wisdom. Faith is eminently pleasing to God, and attracts his graces both because it implies love and in

that it is a homage rendered to his truth. "If you had faith like to a grain of mustard seed," said Jesus to his disciples, "you might say to this tree: Be thou rooted up and be thou transplanted into the sea. And it would obey you" (Luke xvii, 6). Our Lord was probably standing on the shores of the Dead Sea when he said this. Again, when in the vicinity of Mount Hermon, he said: "Amen I say unto you that whosoever shall say to this mountain, Be thou removed and be thou cast into the sea, and shall believe that whatsoever he saith shall be done; it shall be done unto him" (Mark xi, 23), he seized the first comparison at hand to show what marvels only a grain of faith could accomplish. Those who have real faith, however, rarely ask for material wonders; they look, rather, for miracles of a spiritual order. To remove a mountain of pride and substitute a valley of humility; to cause the heavenly virtues of unselfishness and love to bloom in a human heart, naturally as variable and inconstant as the waves of the sea: are not these things indeed miracles which reveal the true nature of God? But for the working of such miracles a pure and holy faith is needed.

There exist in Nature poisonous substances of tremendous power, a single drop of which, undiluted, would suffice to cause death. But pour a drop of this poison into a glass of water, and what happens? The poison is minimized and loses its strength. True faith reveals God to the soul; in its light he is shown so beautiful, so good and great, that to the soul who thus beholds him all else becomes as nothing in comparison with God. How pure are the desires, how ardent the prayers, how immovable the trust, and how generous the love of such a soul! It will perform prodigies of virtue. Look, by contrast, at the Christian who comes to the altar to pray with an anxious mind and a divided heart. Doubtless he, too, has faith; it is faith which has brought him to the feet of our Lord; but it is not the enlightened faith which springs from a true conception of God. In the vessel of his heart there is, indeed, a drop of faith, but with it are mingled many other elements, for it is full of profane thoughts and

of human preoccupations and distractions, all of which hinder true prayer and make meditation impossible. Even the modicum of faith which such a man possesses is the gift of God; but doubt has weakened it. Through his prayers runs the thought: "What I am asking is beyond my deserts; the Lord will not hear me because of my faults. I may beg for humility, but my self-love is too deep-rooted for me ever to be truly humble; I may ask for generosity, but I am too cowardly ever to become generous."

True faith in prayer is so transported with the thought of the goodness of God that it is blind to all else and exclaims only: "God is good; he has promised an answer to prayer, therefore he will hear me. Though for ten, twenty, or thirty years he withhold my desire, it is but to test my constancy; in the end he will hear me, and I shall not die without having attained the perfect love for which my heart aspires."

One of the marked characteristics of true faith is its constancy; it never tires, it knows no discouragement. Its conception of God is so clear that nothing can shake its confidence in his goodness and wisdom; with Job it cries: "Although he should kill me, I will trust in him."

4. *Faith must be cultivated.*

Let us have true faith in the love of God, a faith pure and unadulterated. Let us affirm: "God loves me with an ineffable love, therefore he will refuse me nothing; God loves me with an ineffable love, therefore I can refuse him nothing." This simple truth spoken in good faith will work wonders for us. We should pray with a confidence that will touch the heart of God and draw down upon us the torrents of his grace. In return, and for love of him, we shall rejoice to do all that he may ask. How far more glorious is this than to move a mountain or cause a tree to grow in the sea!

How precious is this virtue of faith, how important its cultivation! "Lord, increase our faith," said the apostles to the Saviour when he bade them always forgive. They felt that for the fulfilment of this noble

but difficult precept of pardon great faith was necessary. It is equally necessary for the practice of all the other virtues. Lack of faith lies at the root of our lack of sanctity, and for this same reason many, even among the souls consecrated to God, fail to obtain the graces he longs to give them. When Jesus said to the father of the demoniac boy, who begged the deliverance of his son. "If thou canst believe; all things are possible to him that believeth," the poor father cried out with tears: "Lord, I do believe; help thou mine unbelief."

Let us offer the same prayer to God, imploring from him the faith which will make the most difficult task possible, and will win for ourselves and others the most precious graces. Perfect faith, like all perfect virtues, is a gift from God, bestowed only upon those who ardently desire it and prepare themselves to receive it.

For the fitting reception of this blessed gift we must banish all earthly desires, and guard against all those worldly ideas which, as they are contrary to the teaching of the Gospel, are obstacles to perfect faith. If we fill our minds with the idle gossip and human vanities which are inimical to the things of the spirit, our faith will not grow. If our outlook on life ignores the working of the omnipotent God who orders all things according to his will, we are not walking in the way of faith, and our judgements will be faulty. Those also fail in faith who see in all that befalls them only the work of chance or of human effort, when they ought rightly to trace everything back to its first Cause,—to the designs of Providence and the will of God. Such as these quite forget to thank God for joys, and when sorrow comes, instead of showing resignation, they complain bitterly and at large. No complaints issued from our Lord's lips when he was stretched upon the cross. He blamed neither the treason of Judas, the hatred of the Sanhedrin, nor the cowardice of Pilate for his death. No; he desired only that the will of his Father might be done, and he made himself obedient to it.

Faith often has hard lessons to teach us. It convinces us of truths which we do not want to hear because they

condemn our actions; it urges us to deeds which are repugnant to our nature. When our Lord spoke to his disciples of his coming Passion, they understood not, nor did they wish to understand what he said. They dreamed of easy and consoling triumphs both for their Master and for themselves, not of sorrow and sacrifice carried even to the length of self-immolation. "They understood not, and they were afraid to ask him."

The upright and generous soul, despite natural repugnance, does not shrink from the lessons faith will teach. She desires truth above all things, and seeks till she finds it. But the pusillanimous, on the contrary, will make excuses and avoid hardships; they flee from the light, and the light will not shine upon them.

Whatever pain these truths of faith may bring, let us clasp them to our bosom; let our reading and our studies be so ordered as to develop our faith; let us imbibe the teaching of faith and live by faith. Nourished with its holy truths, we shall be delivered from the evil influences of the world and from the tyranny of our defects; *Veritas liberabit vos* ("The truth shall make you free"), and the waters of life will flow from our souls—*qui credit in me, flumina de ventre ejus fluent aquae vivae* (John vii, 18).

The stream of grace, a mere rivulet for those of little faith, becomes, for souls whose faith is strong and ardent, as a river whose waters purify and refresh, imparting strength and vigour.

Not alone in this world does the water of life—reward of a living faith—yield its blessings; the fountains thereof mount even to heaven—*Fiet fons aquae salientis in vitam aeternam* (John iv, 14)—and their guerdon will be the pure pleasures of eternity.

CHAPTER XIX

THE VIRTUE OF HOPE

1. *Only the faithful know the true value of heavenly treasure.*

Man was made for happiness, and his whole nature covets it; the body seeks its comforts, the senses their satisfaction, the mind thirsts for knowledge, and the heart for love. But men ever snatch at the first pleasure that comes within their reach, and unless an ardent faith enlightens the soul as to the nothingness of earthly things and the value of those which are eternal, it will be beguiled into seeking happiness where it can never be found.

To how many does the Saviour's parable apply: "The land of a certain rich man brought forth plenty of fruits, and he said: I will pull down my barns and will build greater, and into them will I gather all things that are grown to me, and my goods; and I will say to my soul: Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thy rest, eat, drink, make good cheer. But God said to him: Thou fool, this night do I require thy soul of thee, and whose shall those things be which thou hast provided?"

Daily do we see men repeat this sad mistake under our very eyes, and yet daily do we blind ourselves to the truth, and continue to pin our hopes to the things of this world, though we know them to be ephemeral and unworthy of our regard.

In order to direct our hope and conduct our life aright, we must first have a clear understanding of the vanity of all created things. Many Christians, and even souls consecrated to God, do not sufficiently grasp the worthlessness of temporal benefits and of earthly pleasures.

Rarely, indeed, do we find Christians who care only for the gifts of grace, even if we seek them among those

to whom the words of the Psalmist should be familiar: *Filii hominum . . . ut quid diligitis vanitatem et quaeritis mendacium?* ("Children of men, how long will you love vanity and seek falsehood?"). Too many people here below aim only at procuring repose, comfort, tranquillity, freedom from worry and trouble, the esteem of men, the praises and honours that flatter their vanity. They fill their days with pleasure parties, travels, interesting sights, the reading of exciting novels. There is certainly a great gulf between such imperfect yet often sincerely pious souls and the flagrant sinner who deliberately spurns the divine friendship for the sake of the criminal pleasures of this world. For the former will obediently deny themselves both natural pleasures which are forbidden under pain of grievous sin, or, even if not so forbidden, would be ready to sacrifice them to the duties of their state in life. God is truly the object of the desires and hopes of such as these; on no account would they mortally offend him, but with their sincere desire for heavenly treasure is mixed much love of the things of this world which gratify their human nature, and consciously or unconsciously they find all their pleasure in these. They are not yet enlightened as to the nothingness of earthly things in comparison with heavenly blessings, nor do they realize the merit that is gained by even the smallest sacrifice. Indeed, for a clear discernment of this a faith greater than the ordinary is needed; and such a faith is not the outcome of reflections or considerations, but is infused in the soul by the Holy Spirit through his gifts of Understanding, Wisdom, and Knowledge. With divine condescension this blessed Spirit marvellously transfigures the soul and gives a new viewpoint to the entire life.

St Alphonsus declared one day to his students that it was the thought of the *Quid prodest?* "What doth it profit a man to gain the whole world if he lose his own soul?" that determined his vocation. "These words," said he, "have led many saints to renounce the world, as witness St Ignatius and St Francis Xavier. These words rang in my ears also, when my father would have

persuaded me to accept a position which appealed greatly to the natural man. I said to myself: '*Quid prodest?* All these things are fleeting.' And I resolved to forsake such vanities."

We must remember, however, that whilst a sudden illumination may help in making a true choice of a vocation, only the continual light of the Holy Spirit in the soul can ensure perseverance in it. How many souls enter at first joyfully on the way of holiness, who, alas! later on yield to the solicitations of Nature and fall away from their first fervour!

To whom, then, does the Holy Ghost grant these precious lights?

He is master of his gifts, and in the inscrutable decrees of his divine wisdom he may accord them instantly to the prayer of a soul who has done little to deserve them, or far more tardily to another who has made greater effort.

However, as a general rule the Holy Ghost bestows his lights most freely upon those who place no obstacles in the way, but who diligently prepare for their reception. The Christian who delights to meditate on the brevity of life, the wondrousness of God, and the happiness of possessing him eternally, and who, above all, by generous renunciation, determinedly detaches his heart from creatures, is speedily rewarded with a profusion of these holy lights, and acknowledges them as gifts of the Holy Ghost. By the law of Nature, the deception of a mirage only manifests itself to a traveller when he reaches the spot where its charms appeared. Apparently tempting fruit may be found corrupt only in the tasting. But by the law of grace, those who willingly sacrifice the pleasures of earth are rewarded by a speedy enlightenment as to their deceitfulness, while those who yield to their attractions are ever more and more misled and blinded.

When once a faithful soul has received from the Holy Ghost the power of discerning between good and evil, the true and the false, gold and mere glitter, its perceptions become far more acute than those of the ordinary Christian. It sees clearly how despicable and

dangerous are mere earthly satisfactions, and how beneficial is the suffering which inculcates submission to the sovereignty of grace, so that the most grievous troubles of this life can no longer cause dismay, but are even regarded as blessings.

Every Christian professes belief in the words of our Lord to his disciples: "You will lament and weep, but the world shall rejoice: and you shall be made sorrowful, but your sorrow shall be turned into joy" (John xvi, 20); but only those who are enlightened by the Holy Ghost can grasp their full meaning, and give thanks to divine Providence for tribulations which they know to be as precious seeds of eternal happiness.

Souls which are thus enlightened by the Holy Ghost, and detached from the things of this world, aspire eagerly to the joys of heaven. The holy doctor St Gregory, and Blessed Albert the Great cite this desire for heaven as one of the marks of the working of the Holy Ghost in the soul. "One of the signs of true contemplation," says Blessed Albert the Great, "is to feel weary of living, and to sigh with Tobias, 'It is better for me to die than to live;' to cry with Job, 'My soul is weary of this life;' or with St Paul, 'Unfortunate that I am, who will deliver me from this mortal body?'" (*Par. anim.*, ch. xxxiii).

Death is no calamity to the possessor of perfect hope. Others may grieve at the passing of their youth, but he will rejoice, for to him the swift flight of the years does but shorten the term of his exile.

2. *The great courage of the true friends of God gives strength to their hope.*

The first condition of hope is the ability rightly to esteem the joys of heaven. Souls that comprehend the value of these will long after them, and the more ardently as they more completely renounce the passing and elusive pleasures of earth.

But these heavenly joys can be won only by strenuous effort; they are the measure of the soul's endeavour, of her toil, her labour, and her self-mastery. The Christian

who aspires to heavenly joys must be ready to undergo many trials for their attainment, and the pusillanimous and inconstant will never be sufficiently ardent for the winning of that which exacts so much labour. Their failure in hope is due to the lack of the virtue of fortitude. They will not acknowledge this even to themselves; they hide their want of hope under a mask of humility, and talk glibly of their own worthlessness; but all this is illusion and falsehood; it is fear of the struggle which makes them refuse to recognize its efficacy and yield to discouragement. If such as these would acquire greater valour, they must wage war upon nature with a generous heart; they must make faithful expiation for every fault, and renew the fight after every fall, and God will at length give them complete victory.

Good and virtuous souls enjoy the possession of a firm hope; having made greater efforts, they reap greater rewards and gain confidence in their power to climb the steep and rugged path of virtue, even up to the goal. Many even of these, however, do not aim high enough, or venture to entertain the noble and saintly ambition of mounting to the very summit of pure love. Perfect love seems to them beyond their expectation; they dare not aspire to it, and lack the courage to undertake the labours, the privations, and the combats which it exacts.

Only the true friends of God have this courage; the struggles for self-mastery through which they have passed have rendered their will strong as steel, and the Holy Ghost, in communicating to them the gift of fortitude, has added a superhuman energy to the strength which they have acquired. They are not dismayed at the thought of rigorous self-mortification; that which holds back so many virtuous souls has no power over such as these; calmly and firmly they have resolved never to wander from the way of sacrifice; henceforward their one desire is to grow in grace and in the love of God, to live for him here below, and to possess him for ever in heaven.

We must, nevertheless, not suppose that Christians thus enlightened and fortified by the Holy Ghost are

exempt from all human weakness. They may not, indeed, voluntarily seek empty vanities or pleasures, or the joys which nature covets, for their natural preference is for the things of the spirit; but even they are often lacking in the courage and energy required for an entire refusal of the demands of nature. The struggle between the superior aspirations of the will and the inferior ones of the senses, between humility and self-love, is never-ending; and in this struggle, though usually victorious, the soul sometimes sustains defeats.

3. *The complete confidence of truly faithful souls.*

Perfect hope implies great lights which reveal to us the beauty and attraction of God, and the immense happiness which the soul will experience in the possession of a Being so perfect. It reveals also the ardent desire God has of communicating his treasures to us, and the power which he possesses of strengthening our virtues and transforming our souls.

From all this proceeds confidence, which is the second element of the virtue of hope.

All pious Christians believe in God's promises, all trust in his power and goodness; but, according to the principle already set forth, this confidence, which is the fruit of a reasonable faith, and is always highly meritorious, may be of varying degrees. That which is the fruit of the gift of the Holy Ghost approaches the nearest to perfection; it inspires the soul with an ardent and filial gratitude, a calm and strong assurance, and a deep and unalterable faith. As with the lights which reveal the divine beauty, so also with those which give confidence; they are accorded to such as are prepared to receive them, the Holy Ghost enlightening by preference those who desire to be enlightened, who have faith in the goodness of God, and who seek an increase of this holy confidence.

Let us assure ourselves unceasingly that God is good. He alone is good; the goodness of the best of creatures is as nothing compared with the goodness of God. *Nemo bonus nisi solus Deus.*

What, then, is goodness? It is not weakness, not the easygoing kindness which, through fear of giving pain, condones what is evil; neither does it consist in weak toleration of sin. Leniency is indeed associated with goodness—the leniency and pity of the saint for the sinner, of the great for the lowly, the strong for the weak; and kindness is pre-eminently found therein—the kindness which is shown in an ardent desire, an irresistible urge to do good. The infinite goodness of God exhibits all these traits; he is compassionate; he has pity on our wretchedness; he is indulgent, for he knows of what clay we are made (*ipse cognovit figmentum nostrum*), and infinite is his desire to enrich our souls.

Only in heaven shall we realize what happiness Jesus experiences in bestowing his treasures upon us, how his heart rejoices over the salvation of souls. "I so loved thee," said our Lord to Juliana of Norwich, a holy recluse who lived in England in the fourteenth century, "that I ardently desired to die for thee; and now that I have so suffered and died, my pain is changed into eternal joy."

A saintly Carmelite of the seventeenth century, Mother Frances of the Mother of God, one day had a vision in which our Lord appeared to her at the head of a multitude of souls whom he had just rescued from Purgatory and was transporting to heaven, and he was radiant with joy. The same holy saint was praying to him on a time for a deceased Carmelite when he said to her: "I desire her deliverance far more than you do, more than she does herself; but she must first be purified." If we would attain to perfect confidence in God we must let our minds dwell upon his goodness. We must also have a profound distrust of ourselves, and rely upon God alone. Herein is evidenced a great difference in conduct between souls that are merely pious and those which are far advanced in virtue; the former are anxious, eager, and very dependent on human resources; the latter, whilst equally devout and diligent, rely more on the action of God than on their own methods "Would you know," wrote St Vincent

de Paul, "why such-and-such an undertaking is not crowned with success? It is because we depended too much on ourselves. If a preacher or superior or confessor were to rely on his own prudence, his own knowledge and intelligence, what would be the result? God would withdraw his presence and leave him to himself; he would then find that all his labours availed nothing and produced no fruit; so he would realize his own insufficiency and learn by experience that man can do nothing without God" (*Life*, by Abelly, bk. iii, ch. iii). Every truly enlightened Christian will feel a deep distrust of his own wisdom, and will never give even the simplest counsel without first raising his mind and his heart to God and begging for light.

4. *Confidence in God and anxieties.*

The third condition for the reception of the Holy Spirit's gift of perfect confidence is faithfulness in times of trial and suffering, and a resolute driving away of all fears and despondency.

The first foe that we must overcome is the demon of discouragement. Truly pious souls will rise superior to the delusions of the tempter, and after each fall will renew the combat with fresh courage. They know well that if the prodigal son, whose contrition was less perfect and disinterested than theirs, was yet so lovingly welcomed by his Father, they will receive far greater tenderness from their heavenly Father when they humble themselves before him. Still, even the pious are at times betrayed by the enemy into harbouring cares and anxieties for the future, though Jesus said: *Nolite solliciti esse in crastinum* ("Be not solicitous for the morrow").

Whence come these fears? Some are the fruit of self-love. We shrink from the pain of such things as failures, humiliations, physical or moral sufferings, and our self-will cannot endure to be crossed. Others arise from the legitimate love we feel for relations and friends, for whom we naturally dread misfortune. There are also anxieties born of divine love, fear that

the works of God may not succeed, that he may be affronted, or that certain other souls may be unfaithful and relapse into sin.

At times all these various causes of anxiety seem to conspire together to overwhelm us. Then indeed the poor human heart becomes incapable of confidence; the vagrant and rebellious imagination paints vividly before our eyes the evils which may befall us, and the enemy of our souls delights in impressing these pictures on our minds. His sole desire is to make us suffer, for this hateful being finds pleasure in inflicting pain; if we do not resist him he will disturb the peace of our souls, which, thus troubled, will lose both their courage and their power of discernment; thus deprived, they will be capable neither of prayer nor of recollection, and their union with God will be impeded.

These deplorable effects are more especially the outcome of the anxiety caused by self-love, whether taking the form of love of ease or love of our own will. We can only recover our peace of mind by a resolute striving for detachment, and for that state of holy indifference which will enable us to accept with resignation the trials which it may please Providence to send us, recognizing that they are always for the good of our souls. God knows best how to lead us, and the road along which we must pass. The will of God is wise, holy, loving, and paternal, infinitely preferable to our own will, and worthy of all adoration. Nothing is more certain than this. But God's will is often contrary to ours, for his judgements are not our judgements; and those who cling to their own will neither understand nor wish to accept this great truth. In order to lighten our struggle with anxiety, we must detach ourselves from the human view-point and from natural desires. Even should our fears be legitimate ones, such as the knowledge of evil threatening our dear ones, we should nevertheless make an act of confidence, and calmly resign all to the will of God. But it is only souls advanced in virtue who are capable of thus possessing themselves in peace.

The apostles were in great fear when exposed to the

tempest on the lake of Genesaret, and this although Jesus was with them; but at a later period St Paul, in danger from a tempest not less frightful, remained perfectly calm, and was able to give wise counsel to the sailors and the terrified passengers. The reason for this contrast is that the apostles, at the time of the first storm, were but little advanced in virtue, while St Paul, when journeying as a prisoner to Rome, had already become a great saint.

Even the holiest souls however—those whose trust in God is most firmly established, and who are most resolute in their attachment to his holy will—have their hours of suffering. Suffering is one of the hardest and commonest of our trials here below, and one from which God does not exempt even his best friends. They might almost, indeed, think at times that he had forsaken them. Mary and Joseph were subjected to the greatest anguish at the three days' disappearance of Jesus from their sight; and how great must have been the agony of his holy Mother when the inhabitants of Nazareth dragged him out of the town and endeavoured to throw him over a precipice. Even Jesus himself was overwhelmed with an agony of grief in the Garden of Gethsemani.

These hours of suffering are, nevertheless, the very ones in which hope gains fresh strength and becomes heroic, for, though the heart may be crushed and the mind darkened by the sight of the threatening storm, the will can still cling fast to God. The day will dawn when, in the higher regions of the soul, a light will appear, revealing all the goodness and tenderness of the eternal Father; then does the will, in the strength of this illumination, affirm with all the energy of which it is capable its union with the divine Will and its holy abandonment to it. It may not yet be able to cry whole-heartedly, "I believe, I trust, I accept," for the victory over suffering is not yet entirely won; but it can and does say: "I will to believe, I will to hope, I will to accept all that God sends."

And how salutary is this struggle! No matter how prolonged it may be, nor how great the desolation of

the soul tossed between suffering and the unyielding will, the end thereof will be an assured victory of hope and confidence in God. Thus, in despite of the powers of hell, a magnificent homage is rendered to the inexhaustible goodness and the untiring love of our heavenly Father. Through such victories hope gains new life, for it is strengthened and consolidated by the Holy Spirit.

5. *The fruits of perfect hope.*

Perfect hope is unshakable. It overcomes all obstacles, and perseveres till death. St Paul tells us that the patriarchs persevered to the end in their confidence in God (Heb. xi, 13). Not to them were accorded the fulfilment of the promises or the possession of the land of Chanaan; they had no visible assurance that it would belong even to their children. Heaven, of which the Promised Land is but a figure, was still more hidden from them. But they fixed the eyes of their souls on the far-off celestial joys and saluted them in spirit, giving no thought to the pleasures of earth, but declaring themselves to be but strangers and pilgrims here below.

Faithful souls in like manner, even when years of constant prayer and generous effort seem to have failed to gain for them the virtues they have implored, still continue to hope; they live in the conviction that their prayers have not been in vain, and that their desires will one day be fulfilled.[1]

Perfect hope is most pleasing to God. He cannot but love the soul that aspires only to possess him, and who for his sake despises all earthly goods. He cannot but bless those who, in the face of all trials and assaults of the enemy, believe steadfastly in his love, and hope all things from his goodness. "The more we hope for from God, the more we obtain," says St John of the Cross, "and our hope grows as we renounce self"

[1] "Many people," says Père Lallemant, "never reach a state of high perfection because they have not sufficient hope." (*Doct. spir.*, part ii, sec. 1, ch. iii.)

(*Ascent of Mount Carmel*, iii, 6). "My Sovereign has taught me," writes St Margaret Mary, "that he will only cease to care for me when I begin to care for myself. . . . How often has he not said, 'Confide in me'!" (Letter XIII., *Works*, vol. ii, p. 249).

Invincible confidence conquers the heart of God. Many there are who, in soliciting some grace, thank the Lord in advance, witnessing thus to their assurance of being heard, and great are the graces accorded to such trusting souls.

God delights in hope, for perfect hope is indissolubly linked with love. Hope is born of love; we trust only those whom we love, and them alone do we confidently credit with goodness and wisdom. Love is born of hope, for the more we believe in people, the more do we love and trust them. The poor woman whom the Saviour praised because she had given her all in support of religion showed both confidence and love. If she had loved less she would have said, "I cannot give this alms, or I shall have no bread for the day"; but her great love for God caused her to trust in him. "He is so good," she thought, "so powerful, he will care for me. If I give him that which I need, he will not allow me to want."

The exercise of hope leads on to holy abandonment, by which the soul places itself unreservedly in the hands of God, not concerning itself with the morrow, but praying him to dispose of it as he pleases. While far from giving way to indolence or neglect of duty, such a Christian simply entrusts God with the success of his labours and his own advance in virtue. He thus escapes all care, and also the interior anxieties which trouble those who do not practise this holy abandonment. He unites himself with the heart of God and maintains an unalterable peace.

Abandonment is indeed a precious grace, for it comprises the chiefest and most beautiful of the virtues—faith in the power and wisdom of God; hope, which confides in his goodness; love, which desires only his holy will; and renunciation, which is ready to sacrifice for him all that the heart of man holds dear.

Let us, then, strengthen our hope, and make every effort to obtain from the Holy Ghost the precious gift of perfect hope.

"Those who trust in God," says Isaias (xl, 31), "shall renew their strength. They shall take wings as eagles; they shall run and not be weary; they shall walk and not faint." They will make great and continual progress in virtue; already they are dear friends of the Lord, and this sweet intimacy will become ever deeper and more perfect.

CHAPTER XX

THE LOVE OF GOD

1. *Why God desires our love.*

When asked by a doctor of the Law, "Master, what is the greatest commandment?" Jesus gave the only possible answer, one which, though to us so natural and easy to accept, came as a revelation to the darkened minds of the Jews: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart, and with thy whole soul, and with thy whole mind" (Matt. xxii, 37).

We were created to love; as the mind cannot cease from thought, neither can the heart from love, and it is towards God that this love should turn. We come from God, we return to God, for he made us for himself and desires to be our supreme good, to give himself to us, to unite himself to us for all eternity. As he is our beginning and our end, we should of our own free will turn to him and seek union with him, and this union is nought else but love. God and the faithful soul are united even here below in a reciprocated love, God humbling himself even to dwelling in the soul, and she becoming transformed into him. In eternity we shall possess God and he us by and through love alone; thus love accomplishes that which is the end and aim of God's creation.

What can be wiser, better, or more natural than to love God? Love is a natural tendency of the human heart toward all that is beautiful and good. God is infinite beauty and supreme goodness, therefore he should be loved above all else. He also has an infinite right to our love, a greater claim than any other. To love God is our first and paramount duty, that which includes all others, for it implies, not only delighting in him and seeking his glory, but also willing what he

wills; and as his will is always wise, just, and good, whoever loves him will love and practise all that is wise, just, and good.

Love of God is an obligation, for he who wills the existence of infinite love cannot but will also to be loved. Furthermore, God is all love (*Deus caritas est*), and love begets love. Finally, love desires the happiness of the beloved, and we can only be happy in loving God. For all these reasons does God desire our love.

From the earliest days of humanity God has endeavoured to win the heart of man. His converse with our first parents, and the benefits he bestowed upon them, were all designed to win the affection of his creatures. Later on we hear him commanding love as a formal precept: "Hear, O Israel: the Lord thy God is one Lord. Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart, and with thy whole soul, and with thy whole strength" (Deut. vi, 4, 5). And yet for centuries God was little loved. Undoubtedly there were loving souls even then; the lives of the saints under the Old Law, the outbursts of affection in the Book of Psalms, the holy ardour and vehement zeal of the prophets, give proof of this; but the greater number of those who observed God's laws did so through reverence and fear rather than from love, and their words echo rather the fear than the love of God. *Beatus vir qui timet Dominum* ("Blessed is the man that feareth the Lord"). These men lived honest lives, and were careful to avoid the faults which draw down God's chastisement; but they confined themselves to the practice of merely ordinary virtues. They avoided pride, without advancing in humility; they respected the property of others, but did not practise detachment from the goods of this world; they were patient, but possessed no love of the cross; they respected the laws of marriage, but were not drawn to virginity. Reverence for God, fear of God, yields no increase; only love is fruitful.

God's supreme love for man could not rest content with such mediocrity; he so loves his children that he craves for them the possession of that generous love which is the source of perfect virtue. The lesser virtues

win but little reward, and God would bestow upon his children the greatest and best of his eternal riches. So in his immense love for mankind God sent his only Son. *Sic Deus dilexit mundum ut Filium suum unigenitum daret.* He gave him in order that the Word made flesh should, by his devotion and his sufferings, conquer all hearts and cause a rich harvest of love to spring up in this barren ground. *Ignem veni mittere in terram. Et quid volo nisi ut accendatur* ("I am come to cast fire upon the earth. And what will I, but that it be enkindled?") (Luke xii, 49).

Such is the desire voiced by the gentle Saviour, and desires spring from love; the more we love, the greater our desires. The desires of Jesus are as vehement as is his love. Never has there existed a soul so consumed with love, so passionately desiring to be loved in return, as the soul of Jesus. His pure and holy desires are of an intensity beyond our conception; and it would seem that with the centuries this thirst of the heart of Jesus for the love of the children of men grows ever with the number of his creatures. He told St Margaret Mary that his heart was no longer able to contain the flames of his love; and he expressed himself in a similar way to the Visitation nun whom he cured miraculously a few years ago. "Above all, love me; I so greatly desire love and I find so little, even in hearts which are consecrated to me." How greatly, therefore, does Jesus rejoice when he finds a heart which loves him with a genuine devotion! How prodigal he is with his graces, how kind to such a one! Witness his affection for St Gertrude, for St Teresa, and others. It fills the lukewarm with amazement; they can hardly credit such outpourings of love on the part of a god; but those who love greatly are not surprised; they expect divine endearments from their Beloved.

2. *The benefits of divine love.*

Praebe, fili, cor tuum mihi ("My son, give me thy heart"). It is his infinite desire for our happiness that inspires Jesus to make this sweet request.

Love is our most precious gift; without it all others are as nothing. St Paul tells us that all miraculous gifts, even those of tongues, of prophecy, and of healing, are valueless in a heart that knows not love. Still more worthless are the natural gifts of intelligence, knowledge, genius, beauty, and fortune, unless combined with divine love. Of what profit to Voltaire today is his intellect, to Berthelot his science, to Napoleon his genius? How many men once great in this world may now be in the depths of hell, or at best occupying the lowest places in heaven; while others, who lived here below a life hidden and despised, have soared far higher because their lives were rich in love?

Charity is the mother of all virtues. "Charity is patient, is kind: charity envieth not, dealeth not perversely, is not puffed up, is not ambitious, seeketh not her own, is not provoked to anger, thinketh no evil: rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth" (1 Cor. xiii, 4-6). The triumphs of charity are the triumphs of the true and the good. "It beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things." Love of God leads us to love our neighbour; for we delight in beholding the beautiful traits and dwelling upon the good qualities of those we love, and we excuse their faults, consoling ourselves with the belief that these will one day disappear. It is love also which inspires us to make sacrifices for the souls of others, and to be willing to give everything for them, even our very selves.

They are happy, even on earth, who possess this divine virtue; they are the privileged ones, the beloved of the Lord, for they have that which is beyond all other possessions. In the performance of even their simplest actions they are a delight to the eyes of God, for they do all from love. Jesus called his disciples around him and bade them admire the generosity of the poor widow in the Gospel, who threw her last mite into the poor-box of the Temple. This generous act of hers touched his heart far more deeply than the most brilliant of deeds. The lives of most of us are made up of little things, and this incident teaches us that we can make

use of them all, down to the very least, to give joy to the heart of our good Master, if we perform them with love.

Let us picture this little scene from Jerusalem re-enacted in heaven. Jesus assembles around him his apostles, his saints, and all the vast army of the angels and the elect, and he shows them mankind toiling and troubled on this earth. He points out those who are famous in the world, whose movements are announced in the newspapers, whose words are applauded, who receive triumphal welcomes wherever they go, who preside at the councils of nations, direct world politics, and decide for peace or war. Over against these he shows men and women of another stamp—priests, religious, and simple, faithful souls—leading a hidden life, filled with self-abnegation and humility, who work, suffer, devote and immolate themselves in silence and unnoticed, praying and meditating continually. And to all the hosts of heaven Jesus proclaims:

"These humble and devout souls do me greater service than any others; they give me far higher honour and joy; they win more souls for my kingdom; they contribute more to the welfare of the Church and to the world than do the most famous politicians, for they have renounced self-interest and are animated only by pure love."[2]

Every act of love made by these souls so dear to his heart God rewards in a secret way, one of which they themselves are hardly conscious, but it is above all value; he bestows upon them more of his love and a greater power of loving. *Ego diligentes me diligo* ("I love those who love me"), says the Lord (Prov. viii, 17). He indeed loved us first: *Ipse prior dilexit nos* (1 John iv, 10); it is he who makes all the advances, but whoso responds to his invitation he loves with a more tender and ever-increasing love; between such and God there is a noble challenge, a combat of love, with God always victorious. The more he loves them, the more he desires their love; and by his will each of their acts of love increases their power of loving; so the reward of their love is an increase of love, and what more precious

gift could God grant to his faithful ones? There is nothing they desire more ardently, for he who loves finds his happiness in loving, and the more he loves, the more he desires to love.

3. *The perfect love.*

Nothing is more precious than true charity, nothing more to be desired than perfect love. In what, then, does this perfect love consist? First of all, it implies a lofty conception of God and a great reverence for him, together with a true understanding of our own wretchedness, and a consequent self-contempt. It also includes self-forgetfulness and a seeking in all things of the interests and the glory of God. Egotism leads a man to retire into himself; love impels him to go out of himself, to forget himself for the object of his love. He who loves God—not with the imperfect, divided affection which is only a travesty of true love, but purely, ardently, and unselfishly—will cry: "I am nothing, I deserve nothing, I do not matter; the almighty and good God will care for me; I will throw myself into his arms; to him will I abandon my affairs, my reputation, my health, and my life; let him deal with all as he pleases; he is my God and my all; my sole desire is to love him and to see him loved; what matter the cost to me so that he reigns?" Such disinterestedness is an integral part of love; our Lord's teaching illustrates this. St Mark relates (i, 35) that on one occasion when Jesus had spent the preceding day in working many miracles, he went out very early on the following morning, before daybreak, from the house of Simon and Andrew, and sought a solitary place in which to pray. St Peter and his companions, having found him, said: "All men seek for thee." The crowds, says St Luke (iv, 4), were following close in the footsteps of the apostles, and when they had found him "they stayed him, that he should not depart from them." But these same crowds later on did not hesitate to desert him; their love, though touching, had in it too much of self to endure. On another occasion Jesus

declares this plainly. Again large crowds had followed him (Luke xiv, 25), for the people realized the benefits to be reaped in the company of One whose words were so full of interest, and who was so prodigal of his miracles. Would not so kind and powerful a master procure all manner of good things for his followers? Jesus, the great reader of hearts, sought to undeceive these people, declaring to them that those whose only aim was self-satisfaction were doomed to disappointment. "If any man come to me and hate not his father and mother and wife and children and brethren and sisters, yea and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple" (Luke xiv, 26). Doubtless, even according to the strictest teaching, it would only be necessary to salvation to break with one's relatives if they were an obstacle to the keeping of the divine commandment; but these words show us that for the attainment of perfect love one must be ready to carry self-sacrifice even to the length of leading a life of entire renunciation, to do the will of God without reserve, and to accept lovingly all the trials he may send us.

Perfect love should hold sway over our whole nature; it must govern the mind and all the faculties, for we can only love God with all our minds, all our hearts, and all our strength by consecrating to him all the powers we possess. What a mistake, then, to think to love God with the mind and heart only, and to neglect the active duties of life for the recitation of prayers and other practices of piety! And how equally serious and far more common an error it is to endeavour to love God with all the strength—that is, with all the activities—without apportioning to the mind and heart their share in the exercise of love! "I am absorbed," one will say, "by my occupations; I have to give my whole time to these, and can therefore only remember God consciously at rare intervals; it must suffice me to direct all my intentions properly at the beginning of the day." Such as these certainly do not love God with all their mind and with all their heart, for warm, natural love does not forget the beloved; even during his daily work the father thinks of his family, the mother of her

husband and children; their hearts keep time with their hands.

Love seeks union, transformation into the beloved. We could not but desire to resemble a being so wonderful as God. In love the will delights in the object of its passion; we give ourselves and our wills to God; and as perfect union demands perfect harmony, so we seek to be transformed into likeness with God.

To draw near to God, to live as much as possible alone with him, is the first act of union to which every loving heart will aspire. For the blessed consummation of this union we must be one with Jesus in all the work of life; act as he acted here below; live, not only for, but with him, and so faithfully carry out his inspirations that Jesus and the soul become as one. "If any man minister to me, let him follow me: and where I am, there shall also my servant be" (John xii, 26). How sweet it is to follow Jesus everywhere and in all things! —to the crib to share his poverty; to Nazareth to join in his labours; along the roads of Palestine to partake in his works of zeal and in his charity towards men; to the desert to learn recollection and to gain power for the conflict with Satan; to pray with him on the mountain; to be tossed with him in the tempest on the sea, he our protection; to ascend with him to Thabor, there to receive his consolations; to be nourished in the Cenacle with his sacred flesh and blood; to go with him to Gethsemani; to the Prætorium; to Calvary; to suffer, to be humiliated, and to die with him.

The perfect love which we have just portrayed will be the possession of those who give themselves unreservedly to God, who refuse him nothing. And this, not with the disposition of beginners, whose enthusiasm is often ready only because they have not yet experienced difficulties and struggles, but with a sincerity and a firmness which have endured all tests and been found faithful in the midst of countless trials. Such perfection of love is not, indeed, essential to salvation, but how far does it surpass the love of imperfect souls, and how immense will be the difference in the joy experienced by the one and the other in heaven! Pious but imperfect

Christians have not the same ardour for sacrifice. They may indeed possess the seeds of a pure love of God; they worship him, they desire his glory, but they have not the courage to procure that glory at no matter what cost to themselves, and their dominant disposition is to seek their own interests. They may seek these in God because faith teaches them that there only are they to be found, and in so far as their action is dictated by faith it is supernatural and meritorious; their lives are, on the whole, worthy of reward, and so are their numerous acts of virtue, but how much nobler and holier are those of truly generous souls!

These also believe, and far more firmly than the imperfect, that happiness is to be found in God alone, and they, too, rejoice in the thought of one day possessing him; but in the ardour of their love the thought of God himself comes first, and they lose themselves in him, seeking no longer their own good, but only God. The reward of such disinterested love is beyond all telling; imperfect love even at its highest cannot be compared with it, for the latter is always tainted with self-seeking, and a gift made with reservations, no matter how frequently it is offered, can never equal the gift of the whole self, though the latter were but for one day. Whosoever sacrifices all earthly comforts and conquers all repugnances will most surely experience in heaven infinitely greater joy and bliss in the possession of God than will those who have loved him for many years, but never to the point of immolating themselves for his sake.

This perfect love, ever increasing in depth and strength, until it is no longer a passing act, but an habitual disposition, is the fruit of divine grace, and is inspired in the soul by God himself. Not only does he impart the ability to make acts of love by means of the power of reason, but he also fills the heart with the love of which they are the outcome, thus himself co-operating with the fervent soul in these acts. We indeed receive the love by virtue of having desired it, disposed ourselves for it, worked for it, and submitted courageously to the purifications and trials which have

rendered it possible; yet it is always less the work of the creature than of the Holy Ghost.

4. *Different forms of love, and the sentiments which it inspires.*

The love of which we have been speaking may assume many diverse forms, for the Holy Ghost, who is its source, prompts each individual soul to different forms of action. He inspires Martha to a life of active service; Mary to silent adoration at her Master's feet, bathing them with her tears, and anointing them with precious perfume. Love also changes according to circumstances; it is different in prosperity and adversity, and may even produce varying sentiments at the same time and in the same heart. What may we imagine to have been the feelings of St Peter chained between his gaolers in the prison at Jerusalem; or of St Paul when dragged by the five hundred soldiers of Lysias along the road to Cæsarea? Before all else, happiness must have possessed them, joy in the thought that they suffered according to the will of God. They would confide their future to his divine goodness and wisdom; they would sorrow that God should be so grievously offended by their persecutors; and their hearts would be filled with a burning love for God, and an ardent desire to continue their mission of winning souls for him. Acts of faith, confidence, abandonment, and thanksgiving would thus meet in their hearts, and all would be inspired by love.

Love itself, independently of outward circumstances, often takes different forms, according to the diversity of the lights of grace. Sometimes the soul finds delight in its love, the source of the sweetness which it then enjoys being the revelation of God's presence within it. Thus we learn to know intimately the goodness of God. *Cognitio experimentalis est quando quis experitur gustum divinae dulcedinis* (St Thomas, p. iii, q. 97, a. 2, *ad* 2). At other times, while not experiencing this divine sweetness, we yet aspire vehemently towards God, desiring to lose ourselves in the Beloved. Again,

God may communicate to us a love cold and arid, but pure and powerful, only the will, the highest faculty, as says St Francis de Sales, being then affected by the Holy Spirit. Or love may be painful and martyrizing, the soul greatly desiring to love God but seeming powerless to do so; or we may suffer through the ardour of our desire for God's glory, and at seeing him unknown, offended, and outraged by his children.

The more ardent the love, the greater the suffering it can cause, but the sweeter also the joy that it can give. Souls who love little know neither this sorrow nor this joy; they will hardly believe in them. This is why the life of a saint is to many Christians a sealed book. It is, alas, often so even to those who, by reason of the high vocation to which they have been called, and the many graces bestowed upon them, should walk in the footsteps of the saints; yet they neither understand nor find pleasure in the writings of the great mystics, who have drawn so beautiful a picture of pure love.

As we have already said, love, though often producing lively sentiments of joy, sadness, desire, or fear, can also exist in great purity and intensity in a heart that is cold, hard, and apparently insensible. Since love resides in the will, we can, without experiencing any emotion, will God's honour and glory with great ardour, and regardless of the cost. We may be sincerely ready to sacrifice everything to God, and persist in this disposition in the midst of the severest trials and the most painful difficulties, even whilst the heart be as though paralyzed and incapable of feeling. Ardent feeling is often rather the outcome of sensibility than of a resolute will, and it seldom has a very firm foundation. It is not unusual to see persons of a lively imagination, and apparently ready to work wonders, allowing themselves to be checked by a very slight obstacle. "Not every one that saith to me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven," said Jesus: "but he that doth the will of my Father" (Matt. vii, 21). "You are my friends if you do the things that I command you" (John xv, 14).

The hall-mark of pure love is a constant, ready, and joyful practice of the supernatural virtues of humility, renunciation, patience under trial, and a charity which reaches out to all without exception. *A fructibus eorum cognoscetis eos* ("A tree is known by its fruits"), and the true friends of God by their works.

CHAPTER XXI

THE PRACTICE OF DIVINE LOVE

1. *We should thirst for divine love and renounce all vain affections.*

"Ah! my daughter," said our Lord one day to St Teresa (*Life*, ch. xl.), "how few there are who really love me! From such I would never hide my secrets." Those who greatly love him Jesus calls his friends: *Dico vobis amicis meis.* O sweet and enviable title! Jesus told his apostles that he had no secrets from his friends. "I will not now call you servants: for the servant knoweth not what his lord doth. But I have called you friends: because all things whatsoever I have heard of my Father, I have made known to you" (John xv, 15). This does not mean that the Saviour revealed to his apostles—nor does he ever to his friends on earth—events which lie hidden in the womb of the future; for this would only flatter their vanity. But he imparts to them the secret truths which will enable them to serve God perfectly and to lead a holy life; he teaches them the science of the saints—*dedit illis scientiam sanctorum.* He enlightens and strengthens them; he enriches them with his graces, and transforms their souls into ever more perfect likeness to himself.

How precious is this friendship with Jesus! How may we win it for ourselves? It is a gift—the gift of Jesus to those who love him with a single heart. How, then, can we attain to this perfect love, which is, alas! rarely found, even though it be the vocation of every priest, of every consecrated soul, and of those, too, who, though living in the world, are the recipients of extraordinary graces.

We have seen in the preceding chapter that the soul is powerless to attain this love by her unaided efforts, that it is a gift of God; and we must keep this im-

portant truth in mind, always remembering, however, that God, who, as a saint has said, "gives nothing so willingly as his love," will never deny it to any soul which he sees disposed to receive it.

The first condition for its reception is to have a great longing for it. "The desire to love more," says St Francis de Sales, "is the infallible means of increasing our love. Whoso earnestly desires love will seek it earnestly; whoso seeks it earnestly will find it" (*Life*, by M. Hamon, bk. vii, ch. vi). "Blessed," said the Lord, "are they that hunger and thirst after justice: for they shall have their fill" (Matt. v, 6). But desire alone produces no fruit. A man who is hungry and thirsty will not be content to long and sigh for nourishment; he will bestir himself and not rest till he has secured it, for at any cost he must be fed and refreshed. So also, whover ardently desires pure love will earnestly pray for it, submitting in advance to all the conditions God may impose, and accepting all the trials that divine wisdom may deem necessary to purify and enkindle his soul. He will also multiply his own efforts for the attainment of his desire, and will perseveringly practise self-discipline and self-denial. Only an insatiable hunger and burning thirst for love will render the soul constant in the ardent prayers, efforts, and sacrifices which must be made for its attainment.

But how are we to maintain this burning desire for perfection? By ever keeping before the mind the reasons which make it so desirable. "I live," says St Paul, "in the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and delivered himself for me" (Gal. ii, 20). The thought that God had loved him even unto death was ever present with the holy apostle, and maintained in him a constant desire to return love for love. Jesus has promised that devotion to his divine Heart will make the lukewarm fervent, and will lead fervent souls to perfection. Why is this? It is because this devotion holds ever before the eyes the immense love of Jesus, inspiring us to spurn a life of selfish ingratitude, and to consecrate ourselves to the service of him who has done so much for us. Prayer, spiritual reading, and other

pious exercises are also excellent means of keeping vividly before the mind the goodness of God and the joys which he promises to those who serve him; and all this will continually renew in the heart the thirst for holy love.

Another way of increasing our love for God is to renounce for his sake all affection that is not inspired by him, particularly self-love; for the measure of divine love in a heart is the measure of its self-forgetfulness, its immolation of self. The whole of Jesus Christ's gospel is summed up in the great words: "If any man will come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me" (Matt. xvi, 24).

We must be on our guard lest love of self mingle even with our zeal for God's glory. In many pious persons the desire for perfection is not sufficiently disinterested. Their sentiments, if voiced, would not be, "No matter at what cost to myself, I will endeavour above all things to please God and to gladden the heart of Jesus;" but rather, though almost unconsciously: "I will seek holiness, for virtue is so consoling, perfection so glorious." Perhaps this is not their only motive; love may also play a part, but not the part it should. In the ardent and generous soul the desire for God's glory is so compelling that it cries whole-heartedly: "Into the hands of my Father I commit both the present and the future. May he deal with me according to his goodness. I desire only to work for him, to love him, and to make him loved." Such souls will advance far more rapidly and travel much further than those who have not learned thus to forget self.

Above all will they go far if they are at the same time courageous in the practice of renunciation. Indeed, sacrifices and mortifications made with a pure intention constitute the true means of advancing in love; they are indispensable and nothing can replace them; deeds performed for God, they are acts of purest love; they are also seeds of love, for they beget similar acts, and he who sows many sacrifices will reap much love.

It is a great gain to launch oneself whole-heartedly in the way of renunciation, for he who lacks enthusiasm

will often fail and fall behind. In the path of love and sacrifice, he who hesitates is lost; he who stops to reflect will soon find reasons for avoiding what is unpleasant and seeking that which is easy. Having too little love of God and too great love of self, he will be easily influenced by Nature; his little sacrifices loom large to him; he is satisfied with them, and thereby suffers incalculable loss. But whoever with courageous ardour determines from the start to mortify and humiliate himself, will quickly attain to a degree of love strong enough to enable him to find happiness in suffering and immolating himself for God; his sacrifices will thus cost him less, he will multiply them without count, and will progress rapidly in love.

2. *Different ways of practising love.*

The third and final way of increasing our love is to practise it. "I do not know a better way of acquiring love than to love," said St Francis de Sales, "just as we learn to study by studying, to talk by talking, to work by working" (*Life*, by M. Hamon, bk. xi, p. 392). Let us make acts of love on every occasion. Should God send us trials, separations, bereavements, let us meet them in the spirit of love. By making acts of love we shall win solace for our own heart and help for the departed. Do anxieties or sorrows prey upon us? Let us forget them in loving the God of love, who cares for our needs and watches over our interests. Does the devil tempt us by magnifying in our eyes injuries done to us by our neighbour, by endeavouring to rouse our resentment, to incite us to self-love, to stir up our passions? Let us by an heroic act of love rise above all evil desires, and commend our griefs to the Heart of Jesus. Or does our cowardly nature recoil before some sacrifice asked of us by God? Let us drive away the thoughts which would beguile or dismay us, and let contemplation of the immense love which Jesus bears us, the fatherly tenderness of the most Holy Trinity inspire in us an answering love and self-sacrifice. Always and everywhere may the cry of our hearts be:

"My God, I will in nothing yield to my own desires or my own affections; I will think only of you, love only you."

We should, when praying, make acts of love, both for ourselves, that we may increase in love and be delivered from the wandering thoughts which would distract us and turn us away from God, and for those dear to us, imploring God's favour for them. Then we should invoke his blessing on every important work. For this we need simply to mention to our good Master the soul or the work for which we desire his graces, and then make a whole-hearted act of love. God knows better than we the needs of each of his children, and has a far greater desire for their spiritual good. He awaits only our trustful and ardent prayer to pour out his graces upon them, and acts of love offered with this intention avail more surely than any other prayer, whether for the success of some work, the conversion of a sinner, the sanctification of some beloved soul, or our own sanctification.

Make your act of love thus: "I offer you my love, O my God; I know you to be infinitely worthy of love, and I long to make you more loved. How, O my sublime Benefactor, can I express my gratitude but in loving you? How can I obtain pardon for my faults, how make reparation for them, how prove my repentance and console you for the pain I have caused you, but by loving you, O Jesus, with all my heart?"

It is not always possible to make these acts of love with the sweet unction which should inspire them. But even should the heart feel cold and lifeless, the will can always act, and through it we can still exercise our love. It suffices to say with sincerity: "My God, I wish to love you; increase my love!" Or: "My God, mayst thou be better loved; may sinners return to thee; may the good become holier, and thine intimate friends increase in number and so rejoice thy heart." Or again: "My God, thy will be done; I will all that thou dost will, and nothing except thy will." Each one should choose among these different methods that which most attracts him, for such attraction comes

from the Holy Ghost; he it is who leads each by his own path, and the more docile we are in his hands, the more perfect will be the acts of love he will help us to make.

Love that is of the will can be as intense, as pure, as pleasing to God, and consequently as meritorious as that produced by the feelings. Even in the midst of aridity he who is faithful will possess an energetic and abiding resolution to do all for God, and if he maintain this and renew his promises, he may say confidently with St Paul: *Caritas Christi urget nos* ("The charity of Christ presseth us") (2 Cor. v, 14).

Above all, let love rule our works. Protestations and resolutions are not sufficient; we must show forth our love by our works. *Filioli, non diligamus verbo neque lingua sed opere et veritate* ("My little children, let us not love in word nor in tongue alone, but in deed and in truth,") said the beloved apostle (1 John iii, 18). Our love must be practical, and as ardent and generous as it is constant. We should say from our heart, "Since Jesus has so loved me, I can never do enough for him"; and in this spirit we shall devote ourselves to his service and spend ourselves for him without counting the cost. We shall seek always what is pleasing to him, which means generally that which is least pleasing to ourselves. Nature will protest, but instead of yielding to her complaints we shall do violence to her, crush her, and break her. Should divine Providence, for the sake of achieving our perfection, come to the help of our weakness, and impose on us some painful sacrifice or difficult trial, far from complaining, let us thank God, and find happiness in enduring all things for him.

In the eyes of the selfish and egotistical such conduct seems the height of folly. It may appear so, but it is, in truth, the foolishness of the cross, the foolishness of love. In the eyes of those who love, who are "pressed by the charity of Christ," the real folly lies elsewhere; it is found in selfishness and cowardice, in the weakness which recoils before duty and fears sacrifice, which considers only the objections without seeing the advantages, which fears not to do too little, but too much. Such

human wisdom, which would hold the soul back from giving itself wholly to God, is indeed folly, for it deprives that soul of unappreciable riches for all eternity. The foolishness of love is true wisdom.

Good training combined with sound judgement will inevitably produce fervour, and from fervour a man will soon pass to perfection if he refuse God nothing. He would be a fool who deliberately and in cold blood preferred the vain and passing satisfactions of earth to the eternal joys of heaven, a heartless ingrate who, in face of all the blessings bestowed on him by God, and knowing that by a life of renunciation he would glorify him and render him love for love, yet refused to deny himself and to make the sacrifices inspired by God. Love is, furthermore, the part of wisdom in that it communicates an immense value to our smallest action. Those to whom the seeking of the glory of God at the cost of self, and the choosing always what is most pleasing to him, have become a habit; with whom, thanks to determined efforts, such a resolution has become sincere and steadfast, and who have generously and effectively made a sacrifice of all that tends to gratify Nature; in such as these great perfection of love will shine forth in all things, even in acts which cost them little. And if they are further nourished, especially in prayer, with the thought of the grandeur, the goodness, and the perfections of God, are lost in an admiration of him (not vehement, but intense), and are animated ever by the holiest motives, they will every instant acquire fresh treasure, and their spiritual riches will abound.

This explains the rapid and astonishing progress made in perfection by souls fully detached from themselves and living wholly for God. Our Lord made known to St Teresa that a young professed religious, Isabella of the Angels, who died after spending only five years in religion, had acquired more merit in those five years than others who had passed fifty years in a life of perfect regularity. It is thus that some young souls of our own day—St Gabriel of the Seven Dolours, St Teresa of the Child Jesus, Gemma Galgani, and

Benigna Ferrero—rose in a few years to the heights of heroic love.

It was not only the purity and intensity of their love, but also their familiar tenderness—fruit of an unlimited confidence—which rendered these young souls so pleasing to our Lord, and induced him to give a marvellous growth to their love. Gemma Galgani *tutoyait* her Jesus, and he did not rebuke her for it. St Teresa of the Child Jesus was not less confiding. If we wish to grow in love, let us consider ourselves, not as the servants, nor even as the disciples, but as the intimate friends of Jesus, his tenderly loved brother or sister; for Jesus loves to be treated as an intimate friend. Why did he so humble himself in the Incarnation and in the Eucharist? Why did he abase himself to our level, reduce himself to our stature? It was that we might no longer fear him, but might treat him as an equal, for friendship supposes and demands a certain equality. *Amicitia pares invenit aut facit.* Those who fail to approach him with intimate familiarity, who do not talk with him heart to heart and with complete abandonment, do not fulfil our Lord's desires. He asks no less than this of us, the gentle Saviour, *Quod stultum est Dei sapientius est hominibus* ("Whose foolishness is wiser than men") (1 Cor. i, 25). He who has committed the foolishness of love for each of us, he desires to incorporate himself in us, to become one with us, that we may be transformed by him, and may each of us become another Jesus.

Happy he who comprehends the tenderness of the Heart of Jesus; who dwells upon it unceasingly; who never for a moment forgets the Beloved, the divine Spouse of his soul; who speaks to him a thousand times a day as to a cherished brother or another self: "You love me, O Jesus, who am so unworthy of your love. Truly, Lord, 'he whom thou lovest is sick,' his soul is weak; sin has left its traces there; there are within me so many evil tendencies and so great a languor; heal, then, I beseech thee, these weaknesses. I know that your love has not grown cold, that neither my past faults nor my ingratitude have power to chill your

tenderness. You died for me when I was yet a sinner, and you love me even more on seeing how I now sincerely desire to give up everything for your sake. I know that my soul is already pleasing in your sight, but when you have purified, strengthened, and inflamed it, it will respond better to your love. You love me, O Jesus, even to folly, and you would associate me with you in your works. Let me, then, work with you. I will do all for your satisfaction, nothing for my own; I will live a life of renunciation and self-sacrifice, that I may resemble you; I will accept humiliation even as you did; I will work and labour assiduously, and as you spent yourself, so will I. I will pray and suffer for my brethren, and you, O Jesus, on your part, will touch their hearts, and will transform and strengthen their wills. I offer you my devotion, and you will make it fruitful."

May we thus thirst for divine love, and expel from our hearts by an absolute renunciation all that might hinder its growth. May we exercise our love by habitual union with God, a union of mind, of heart, and of will, that it may be one with his in all things. May the thought of Jesus' immense tenderness call forth from our hearts an answering affection, confiding and familiar. Then God, seeing us bent on doing all in our power to respond to his appeal, will himself pour into our souls a love pure and tender and stronger than death. *Fortis est ut mors dilectio* (Cant. viii, 6).

CHAPTER XXII

FRATERNAL CHARITY

1. *Charity is enjoined by God.*

To the momentous question, "Master, what must I do to possess eternal life?" Jesus answered: "What is written in the Law? How readest thou?" He bade the scribe who questioned him repeat the two great commandments, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart, with thy whole soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind: and thy neighbour as thyself," and told him: "Thou hast answered right. This do: and thou shalt live" (Luke x, 27, 28). "On these two commandments dependeth the whole law and the prophets" (Matt. xxii, 40). Jesus thus shows us that all our duties are embodied in love for God and love for our neighbour. In other passages of Holy Scripture love of our neighbour alone is represented as the key to unlock the gate of eternal life. "Come, ye blessed of my Father, possess ye the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. For I was hungry, and ye gave me to eat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me to drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in" (Matt. xxv, 34, 35). Following on these words comes the precept that the violation of charity is the only cause of damnation. St Paul also wrote to the Galatians, "All the law is fulfilled in one word: Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself" (Gal. v, 14), and to the Romans: "He that loveth his neighbour hath fulfilled the law. Love is the fulfilling of the law" (Rom. xiii, 8, 10).

Does, then, love to our neighbour comprise all that is necessary to salvation, as certain unbelievers proclaim? Must not duty to God and duty to ourselves be also taken into account? It is evident that eternal life is

awarded only to the man who has not gravely violated any duty, and the passages quoted above show how important a virtue is supernatural charity towards our neighbour, and what a great place it should occupy in our lives; indeed, we should almost infer that whoever possessed this virtue in its fulness would in consequence fulfil all his duties. *Ama et fac quod vis*, said St Augustine ("Love and then do what you will"), for your will, guided by love, is certain to desire only what is good. But in order to love our neighbour as God would have us love him, we must first love God himself, for love of God is the source of love for our neighbour.

We must ever be ready to sacrifice our own interests and to hold our lives cheap for the sake of others, for self-renunciation is the key to all the virtues.

A soul that possesses true charity is assuredly living in the grace of God. "We know that we have passed from death to life because we love the brethren," says the apostle St John (1 John iii, 14). Weak and imperfect charity towards our neighbour shows the other virtues to be also weak and imperfect, and the soul but little advanced in the way of holiness. "And I, brethren, could not speak to you as unto spiritual, but as unto carnal, as unto little ones in Christ. I gave you milk to drink, not meat: for you were not able as yet. But neither indeed are you now able: for you are yet carnal. For, whereas there are among you envyings and contentions, are you not carnal and walk according to man?" (1 Cor. iii, 1-3). When Christians attain to the perfect practice of the great virtue of charity, they become true disciples of Christ. "By this shall all men know that you are my disciples, if you have love one to another" (John xiii, 35). What a beautiful spectacle they then present to the world, and what an indisputable proof of the divinity of their religion! Jesus pleaded for such a witness in his prayer after the Last Supper: "That they all may be one, as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee; that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me . . . and that it may know that thou hast loved them, as thou hast also loved me" (John xvii, 21-23).

2. Two contrary tendencies of the human heart: natural affection for our neighbour, and egotism.

Are Christians alone capable of affection and devotion? By no means. We frequently find, even in pagans and unbelievers, strong and lasting affections and noble sentiments of unselfish devotion, inspired by friendship, love of family or country, or even by love of humanity. But the charity which is ever humble and sweet, merciful in its judgements, pure and disinterested, which reaches out to all creatures, even the most degraded, which carries devotion to the pitch of self-sacrifice, which fills the whole life and concedes to Nature none of the pleasures for which it thirsts; this charity, which since the time of Jesus Christ has been practised by so many Christian souls, is assuredly the fruit of Christianity, one of its most marvellous, and proves this religion to emanate from God alone.

There are two kinds of love for our neighbour—the natural and the supernatural. It is natural for a man to love his family and his friends, and also, to a certain extent, his fellow-men. Our instincts lead us to help others, and to sympathize with those who suffer; we hasten to the rescue of one who is in danger or trouble, and we find pleasure in giving pleasure. *Homo sum,* said a pagan author, *et nihil humani a me alienum puto* ("I am human, and I regard no other human being as a stranger"). Virgil has written the following beautiful words: *Haud ignara mali miseris succurrere disco* ("Having known misfortune, I know how to help the unfortunate"). Even this purely natural sentiment is the work of God. It is he who inspires it in the human soul, who reveals to it the nobility and the benefit of mutual service. Having made man gregarious, it was an act of wisdom and goodness on the part of God to plant the germs of love in his heart; and in the divine plan this natural love was to serve as a foundation for the supernatural.

Supernatural love does not derive its inspiration from the reason, but from the light of faith; it is the com-

mand of God, who rewards charity and punishes those who offend against it. In loving my neighbour I do the will of God, that will which was made known to man from the very beginning, for the law given to Moses decreed: "Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself" (Lev. xix, 18). Thence also is deduced the rule of conduct which Tobias gave his son: "See thou never do to another what thou wouldst hate to have done to thee by another" (Tob. iv, 16).

Man needs such a law of conduct, for if, as has been said, he is the possessor of innate benevolence and a natural tendency to do good, he is also unconsciously inclined to consider himself before his neighbour, to claim a greater share of attention for himself than he is willing to give to others, and to be blinded and misled by self-love. Though at times he finds it easy to do good, at others it seems unbearable to him to be gainsaid or to have his plans thwarted. Mankind is the prey of conflicting interests; the happiness of one is often the source of sorrow to another; their desires may be radically opposed. So, in order to ensure the enjoyment of his comforts and pleasures, man adopts the worldly motto "Everyone for himself," and he recoils before any service that makes demands on him. He even feels an antipathy to those who would interfere with his desires, judging them more severely and unjustly than he would wish to be judged, and treating them as he would not himself like to be treated. Those who act thus are the slaves of self-love; they take umbrage when they find themselves eclipsed by others, and they entertain for those who thus outshine them feelings of jealousy and aversion. Such narrow-minded, self-centred people will be capable of but little affection, and that little will be only the outcome of self-interest; they will esteem and praise only those who share their own shortcomings, those who give them pleasure and flatter them, or whom they feel care for them; all others they will criticize and depreciate.

3. *Perfect and imperfect love for our neighbour.*

An often unconscious egotism is the greatest enemy of charity. The Lord warns us against this evil tendency when he commands us to love our neighbour as ourselves, thus reminding us that we are all equal, and have an equal right to the affection of our fellow-men.

The Mosaic law exacted only so much. It went far, but it did not satisfy the heart of Jesus. He himself loved us with a far nobler and more perfect love. He saw in each one of us a child of God his Father, beloved by him, destined to mirror his image, called to live his divine life, to be clothed with his qualities, enriched with his treasures, deified and transfigured into himself for all eternity. Jesus so loved our souls as to immolate himself for them; this was an altogether new way of love, and one that all we his disciples are called to follow.

"A new commandment I give unto you," he said, "that ye should love one another, as I have loved you" (John xiii, 34). It is natural to us to love the children of a friend, of a brother or a sister, because in them we see the likeness of those we love. Jesus commands us to love each other because we are all the children of God whom we should love above all. He also declares the second commandment to be like unto the first: we must love alike both God and the children of God. In thus loving each other we share in the love of Jesus for us all. "I have you in my heart," said St Paul to his dear Philippians, "and God is my witness how I long after you in the bowels of Jesus Christ" (Phil. i, 8); by which he means: "I love you with the heart of Christ; I love you as he loves you."

Souls who have received from God the gift of a lively faith and a pure love find no difficulty in thus loving their neighbour. Their faith sees in their fellow-men the beloved children of God, and their love of God leads them to love those whom he loves, for God himself implants this love in their hearts.

Perfect fraternal charity is, then,—like perfect faith and perfect love, a gift granted only to faithful souls. It is the reward of their generosity, and is given by God in full measure to those who have voluntarily made great efforts and suffered much in the practice of this beautiful virtue. Each sacrifice made for our neighbour brings us an increase of the gift of charity; but carelessness and indifference in helping others will cause our charity to become less ardent and our faith less pure.

4. *How we should foster the growth of charity in our hearts.*

To obtain the gift of pure charity, great effort is needed, and if it has already been granted to us in some measure we must cultivate it with care, endeavouring to avoid all that might injure it. We must model our charity on that of Jesus. "For I have given you an example," says our good Saviour, "that as I have done to you, so you do also" (John xiii, 15). First, then, let us try to conform our sentiments to those of the heart of Jesus. *Hoc sentite in vobis quod et in Christo Jesu* ("Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus"). True charity springs from the heart, so our hearts must be softened and impregnated with love. If we would love our neighbour as Jesus has loved him, we must behold him, as it were, in the heart of God. We must ever remind ourselves that he is the beloved child of God, who gave him his life, and calls him to be one of his elect for all eternity; and that Jesus so loved him as to suffer for his sake.

We can measure our love for our neighbour by our judgement of him and our willingness to excuse his faults. On the cross, Jesus prayed for his infamous executioners. There was certainly nothing lovable in them; they deserved only execration. But the love of the Saviour found an excuse for them in their ignorance of the horror of their crime: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." Thus will act all charitable souls; love will make them slow to believe accusations brought against their neighbour. If we

willingly listen to criticisms and scandals it is a sure sign that we have little charity, for we should dislike to hear those we love blamed or condemned. Love will never commit the injustice of condemning without proof; it will pay no attention to vague accusations or malicious words; it will even mistrust what is related as fact, for it knows how common are exaggeration and perversion. It never forgets that exterior acts draw their merit or demerit from the intentions, from the purity or perversity of the motives in the depths of the soul; and as these motives are hidden, it will not pass judgement on them. The charitable will keep a strict guard over their impressions, for they know that an isolated fact or a simple word may often lead to the formation of rash and ill-founded judgements, and that people may be unduly influenced by the opinion of others. The friends of Job, for instance, were wise and good men, but his misfortunes inspired them with doubts of his innocence; they communicated these impressions to each other, and were thus led to misjudge the holy patriarch.

The humility of the charitable will prevent them from forming hasty judgements. "Let him that is without sin among you cast the first stone," said Jesus to his disciples (John viii, 7). The thought of our own worthlessness should make us humble in the presence of our neighbour; he who acknowledges himself a sinner will never be unduly severe.

Those who are united to God understand and follow the rules of prudence which should govern our judgements. The fraternal charity and deep humility with which God himself inspires them inclines them to leniency, and the peace which reigns in their hearts preserves them from passionate and hasty opinions. They are too enlightened by God to see evil where there is none, and even when forced to recognize undoubted faults they will still show love and pity to the culprit, and pray for his conversion.

Inspired by such sentiments, the elect of God will naturally, according to the divine teaching, "rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those that weep";

and this affectionate sympathy will win all hearts and create an atmosphere of benevolence. It is also the source of all kind words. Cutting speeches, even when true and deserved, are always harmful; the soul that has been thus wounded in its self-love will remember it with resentment; but loving words, which may be bracing as well as kind, accomplish great good; they can express more and may be more efficacious even than kind acts.

5. *Jesus, the model of charity.*

"Blessed are the meek, for they shall possess the land" (Matt. v, 4). The divine Master, who made this proclamation, was himself meek and gentle and full of kindness even towards sinners. The only ones to whom he spoke harshly were the proud Pharisees, who perverted the people. Both his kindness and his severity sprang from love. *Benignitas et humanitas apparuit Salvatoris nostri Dei* ("God our Saviour has shown forth his kindness and love for man"). Behold the perfect model! Wise are they who will imitate him!

He is also the model of charity in action. Jesus perfects the rule which Tobias gave his son, "Do not do to others what you would not wish them to do," saying: "Whatsoever you would that men should do to you, do you also to them" (Matt. vii, 12). He thus gives us the golden rule of charity, which shows their duty plainly, even to the dullest; and he makes it still clearer by his action. "I am in the midst of you," he says, "as he that serveth" (Luke xxii, 27). Sincere and ardent love, then, will impel a man to become the servant of those he loves, to work and suffer for them, to devote his strength and talents to their service; and this without any desire for reward, but feeling indeed amply repaid by having given pleasure. "To love," said Leibnitz, "is to find happiness in the happiness of others."

Such is the love of Jesus. His whole life was one of selfless devotion. The labours even of his hidden years

were performed for the sake of his brethren; but more particularly did he dedicate the three years of his evangelical ministry to the service of the children of men. Those who are faithful to the new commandment which Jesus gave to the world will love their fellow-men to the point of becoming, like him, their servants. People who are absorbed in themselves, and who possess but little charity, hate to be inconvenienced, and are incapable of devotion; such kindnesses as they perform will be given grudgingly, and they will be inclined to complain if met with ingratitude.

Those who have won for themselves the gift of pure charity will act very differently; they will always choose the worst part, and will take the heaviest share in every burden; they are ever ready to sacrifice their own comfort and to put their own opinions and desires on one side.

Far from enslaving souls, this practice of pure charity sets them free; and those who through love devote themselves to the service of others are, St Paul tells us, the freest of men. "For you, brethren, have been called unto liberty. Only make not liberty an occasion for the flesh: but by charity of the spirit serve one another" (Gal. v, 13).

The selfish and indolent, who prefer to give orders to their brethren rather than to serve them, who are impatient and irritated when their plans are not followed, live according to the flesh, and are in bondage to it; but those who through charity serve their neighbour, enjoy consolation and peace of soul; they follow the dictates of their own heart, and so possess true liberty.

But Jesus did not only give his services; he gave his life. "In this we have known the charity of God, because he hath laid down his life for us: and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren" (1 John iii, 16). "Greater love than this no man hath, that a man lay down his life for his friends" (John xv, 13). We may not be asked to shed our blood, but we are all called to give our lives, little by little, day by day, immolating our wills and sacrificing ourselves on the altar of charity. Those who are truly charitable will

not waste their time on vain pleasures; every moment, every thought, every action, will be by them consecrated to the service of God and the salvation of their fellow-men. This is to lay down one's life for one's brethren.

6. *The heavenly blessings granted to charitable souls.*

We have endeavoured, to the best of our ability, to paint the perfect charity with which God fills the hearts of all who give themselves to him without reserve. If we are faithful in the cultivation of this gift and guard it carefully, trying never to offend against so beautiful and delicate a virtue, it will one day blossom forth in perfection in our souls. God rewards the charitable by rendering their charity purer, more enlightened, and more generous. What blessings does perfect charity procure for us! "No one can be lost who exercises charity," said St Vincent de Paul. "If one of you," he once said to his missionaries, "was obliged to beg his food, and sleep under a hedge, ragged and shivering with cold, and one should come to you and say: 'Poor priest, what has brought you to this pass?' What happiness it would be, dear Fathers, to be able to reply: 'Charity'!" (*Life*, by Abelly, t. iii, ch. ix). Yes, it is indeed a source of happiness to know how to practise charity at one's own expense, and it gives joy also to the heart of God. Nothing more delights our heavenly Father, nothing more touches the heart of Jesus, than to see men love each other. The sight of a united family rejoices the heart of the father; and Jesus, who loves his children far more than any earthly father, also rejoices when we share his sentiments and his devotion, by showing love one to another. In what touching terms did he petition his heavenly Father for perfect concord between his disciples! "That they all may be one, as we also are one" (John xvii, 21). The Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost are One in mind and heart. Those who share the same faith and the same love for God should be one also in holy desire, in self-

renunciation, and in zeal for the interests of God; they will then be united even as are the three divine Persons, and heavenly graces will descend upon them with increasing abundance.

"He that loveth his brother abideth in the light: and there is no scandal in him. But he that hateth his brother is in darkness," says St John (1 John ii, 10). Many lose this light of grace; they become cold and lose all fervour in prayer because they will not fight against the flesh, but grudge self-sacrifice, and because, instead of loving their neighbour, they judge and criticize him. But those who generously practise charity will become ever more enlightened and blessed of God. Already here below the Lord repays a hundredfold whatever is done for his children. "Amen I say to you, as long as you did it to one of these my least brethren, you did it unto me" (Matt. xxv, 40). Even here on earth he requites us with the inestimable gift of his friendship. "This is my commandment, that you love one another, as I have loved you," says the divine Master, and he immediately adds: "You are my friends, if you do the things that I command you" (John xv, 12, 14). The friend of the neighbour becomes the friend of Jesus. Who would not gladly thus purchase the friendship of God?

CHAPTER XXIII

ZEAL

1. *Every strong soul will be zealous either for good or evil.*

To make our fellow-men happier by making them more virtuous is the most perfect exercise of the beautiful virtue of charity. Such spiritual charity is as far superior to corporal charity as is the soul to the body; for the good that is done to the body is ephemeral, while that done to the soul is eternal.

Have we, then, power to influence other souls? Certainly, and we often do so unconsciously and unintentionally. Man was created to be a member of a society, and it is not natural for him to keep his feelings to himself; he must impart them to those around him. As the flower spreads its perfume and decay its putrefaction, so the good edify and the wicked give offence; inveterate sinners will inevitably seduce and corrupt their brethren, and a few evil souls will infect many weak ones. "Know you not that a little leaven corrupteth the whole lump?" (1 Cor. v, 6). "Take heed," said the Master, "and beware of the leaven of the Pharisees and Sadducees" (Matt. xvi, 6). Perfect souls, on the other hand, exercise a powerful influence for good, and a few such may be the means of bringing salvation to many others. Jesus compares the kingdom of heaven to leaven "which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal till the whole was leavened" (Luke xiii, 21). The twelve apostles were this leaven, and they converted the world.

Some people, however, have but little influence; such are the careless and the slothful, who do neither good nor evil. Weak and cowardly, they lack the courage to

fight against sin, or to work for the extension of the kingdom of God; but what a tremendous duty they thus neglect, and if they have been the recipients of grace, what a responsibility they evade! Jesus has declared every barren fig-tree to be accursed. St Augustine teaches that the good are often punished with the wicked for failing to combat sins which they could have uprooted (*De Civit. Dei*, i, 9).

God could not, indeed, do otherwise than chastise the egotism of the lukewarm, for he that is without zeal is evidently without love. He who loves God will long for him to be known, obeyed, loved, and adored by his creatures; he who loves Jesus will do that which Jesus so ardently desired, for which he suffered so many hardships, underwent so many humiliations, and endured so much suffering; he who loves his brethren will spend himself in their service, and in the endeavour to procure for them the greatest of blessings—the attainment of eternal happiness and escape from the tortures of hell.

This very day thousands of souls must appear before the Sovereign Judge, and their fate be decided for all eternity; numbers among them are in danger of hell, and we by our prayers and sacrifices may obtain for some of them at least triumphant graces which will save them. He must be without heart or reason who, knowing this, yet through selfishness refuses such charity, and lets souls perish which he might have saved.

2. *God desires man to be associated with him in his work of sanctification and salvation.*

The greater our love, the greater will be our zeal. St Francis de Sales, in his *Letter to the Archbishop of Bourges* (xii, 229), remarks that our Lord, in giving St Peter the command "Feed my sheep," did not first ask him, "Art thou learned and eloquent?" but only: "Lovest thou me?" It is as if he would say: "If you love me, prove your love by devoting yourself to the souls which are dear to me." "Lovest thou me more

than these? If you so love me, prove it by your work." "If we love well, we shall preach well," concludes the holy doctor, "for no preacher can be truly eloquent unless he be also zealous, and the words of the latter will bear much fruit."

The more God asks of us, the more certain may we feel of his love, since he thus favours us with a greater share in his work of predilection. How, indeed, has God proved his love for the children of men? Is it not by sharing his blessings with them and making them like unto himself? He does this by bestowing on us sanctifying grace, which enables us to share in his divine nature, and to accomplish works which will be, not merely human, but divine. To all the faithful God accords this divine resemblance, but he gives it more perfectly to his true friends, making of them what he himself is, and what constitutes his eternal glory—sanctifiers and saviours. Unless we thus resemble him we cannot share in his work. But the Holy Ghost affirms that we are called to be God's coadjutors,—*Dei sumus adjutores* (1 Cor. iii, 9),—and our power to help him is so great that he even makes the success of his work—the holiness and salvation of other souls—depend upon our co-operation. Doubtless when souls are lost it is through their own sins and because they have resisted grace, but true zeal will enable us to touch the unfaithful souls and to obtain for them abundant and powerful graces which will bring them back to God. It is our privilege, then, to share with Jesus for all eternity the glory and happiness of having snatched souls from damnation and led them to eternal felicity. In heaven the saviours and the saved will rejoice together. The saved will include the immense multitude of the elect who owe their salvation to Jesus and to his coadjutors; and eternity will not suffice them to render worthy thanks to him for his divine mercy. The others —the élite of the celestial court, the intimate friends of Jesus, saved also by him—have been, with him and like him, saviours of their brethren; in heaven they will laud the goodness of God, whose privileged ones they were, and the innumerable company of those who owe to

them in part their eternal happiness will form around each a brilliant crown, a triumphant cortège.

It is the great desire of the Heart of Jesus to gather around him a vast army of valiant auxiliaries. To this end, to every human soul as it grows in grace, the Lord communicates the double sentiment of zeal for the Father's glory and love for other souls. "I seek not my own glory . . . but I honour my Father" (John viii, 49, 50); this was the abiding sentiment of the Heart of Jesus. Never, as he himself says, has he "sought his own glory." "But he that seeketh the glory of him that sent him, he is true, and there is no injustice in him" (John vii, 18). For the glory of his Father he offered himself as a victim, the holocausts of the Old Law having been found unavailing. "Holocausts for sin did not please thee. Then said I: Behold I come . . . that I should do thy will, O God" (Heb. x, 6-7). For the glory of his Father he lived in humiliation and died in torture, and it is for his Father's glory that he still immolates himself on our altars, as also for the salvation of souls. Such compassion filled the soul of the Saviour for the poor children of Adam that he willed to share in their sufferings. We are told how his heart was moved to pity at the sight of the widow of Naim, of Jairus and his wife, and many others. *Misereor super turbam* ("I have compassion on the multitude"), he said to his apostles, "for behold they have now been with me three days and have nothing to eat" (Mark viii, 2). Jesus felt deep compassion for physical suffering, but spiritual evils touched him even more profoundly. When he saw the people as sheep without a shepherd, his heart was overcome with sadness (Matt. xx, 36). Of all the troubles that afflicted him, none caused him so much pain as sin, for it is sin which brings the greatest suffering to man and to God. Man can use all other ills as means to merit for himself ineffable and eternal joys, but sin brings only bitter deception in its train, and incurs a terrible debt to divine justice, a debt the expiation of which will be more cruel than the sinner can imagine, and which may even lead to the loss of eternal and inestimable treasures. Other

evils do but vindicate God's supremacy; but by sin God is offended, his rights are violated, his glory injured, his holiness wounded, his benevolent desires frustrated; and the death of Jesus and the graces which cost him so much to win are trampled underfoot by sin.

Jesus desires that faithful souls grasp this terrible fact. He wishes them to share in his longing for his Father's glory, in his hatred of sin, and his compassion for sinners. Every sincere and pious Christian is stirred in some measure by these emotions, and as time goes on this zeal should grow; but unless the soul practise renunciation its development will inevitably be hindered by undefeated obstacles and faults. The desire for the divine glory is quickly stifled by any yielding to love of ease and tranquillity, to desires for worldly success, or for the approbation and esteem of our fellow-creatures.

3. *Perfect zeal, inspired by love and enlightened by faith, is charitable and constant, prudent, courageous and contrite.*

Let us now enquire into the nature of this pure and ardent zeal, which is communicated by God to his true friends, that they may be perfect imitators and powerful coadjutors of Jesus. True zeal is essentially an extension of divine love. The perfect, set on fire with this love, and oblivious of self, experience a most ardent desire for the glory of God. The opening requests of the Lord's Prayer, "Hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come; thy will be done," perfectly express their constant and dominant dispositions. They utter them with joyful sincerity, for it is to this end that all the works of their lives are directed. To see God glorified is their greatest joy; and their acutest sufferings are caused by the knowledge of their own powerlessness to do him worthy service, and the thought of the ingratitude with which he is treated by so many of his creatures.

True zeal consists also in active love for our neighbour; it is full of affection. The epistles of St Paul reveal the tenderness of his heart toward his converts;

he addresses them as dear sons, who are the objects of his solicitude. Their progress delights, their sufferings afflict him, and their faults cause him grief. But this affection of his is no merely weak and human feeling; it is wholly supernatural, though most tender, and extends even to those who are deaf to his exhortations. "I have great sadness and continual sorrow in my heart" (Rom. ix, 2). This sadness is due to the obduracy of the Jews, and the fulfilment of the prophecy of Isaias in their regard: "All day long have I spread my hands to a people that believeth not and contradicteth me" (Rom. x, 21).

All true friends of God possess this great love for souls. Those, on the other hand, who have not practised holy detachment care too much for themselves to be capable of perfect love for others, and they shrink from the thought of the sufferings which the exercise of zeal may bring. Only divine enlightenment will enable us to regard our fellow-men as dear children with ourselves in the family of our heavenly Father. Left to ourselves, we are apt to perceive only the failings of humanity, and to lose sight of the sanctifying grace which is hidden under its faults like a diamond embedded in mud. We have to remember that God is able and willing to work miracles of grace even in sinners. Souls united to God always take these supernatural views; they are instinct with an affection and devotion which are proof even against ingratitude—a manifest sign that these sentiments in them are not merely natural ones, but precious gifts from God, of which nothing can deprive them.

Faithful souls, moreover, like Christ their God, live habitually in the thought of the life to come, and care little for that which is passing. Those who are good but imperfect believe, indeed, in a future life, but they do not truly grasp the reality of it; therefore they take far more to heart than they should both the sorrows and difficulties of this present life, and the wrongdoing of their neighbours. With God, who is eternal, there is neither past nor future; all is present. Contemplating our souls, he foresees the beauty, glory, and holiness

which will one day be theirs, and he loves them as they will be hereafter, rather than as the imperfect things they now are in this short and changing life. So is it with truly zealous souls; sharing as they do in great measure the sentiments of God, they discount in others the faults which will one day disappear, and with eyes fixed on the life to come they devote themselves to their welfare, procuring for them and for themselves the blessings of eternity.

And what are these eternal blessings but the gifts of grace; that grace with which even here below souls are magnificently adorned, that they may become worthy and acceptable in the sight of God? "I am jealous of you with the jealousy of God," said St Paul to the Corinthians. He was jealous of their purity, jealous of their perfection, jealous of their sanctity. Filled with divine enthusiasm, the friends of God spare themselves no trouble to procure for others these precious graces. They study, first, to win the hearts of those they would serve. "I made myself the servant of all," says the great apostle, "that I might gain the more. And I became to the Jews, a Jew, that I might gain the Jews: to them that were under the law, as if I were under the law. . . . To them that were without the law, as if I were without the law. . . . I became all things to all men, that I might save all" (1 Cor. ix, 19-22). "As I also in all things please all men, not seeking that which is profitable to myself but to many: that they may be saved" (*ibid.*, x, 33).

Yet, alas! this very zeal, which imparts such ardour for the winning of hearts, such courageous self-sacrifice for the sake of pleasing those whom we wish to save, often tends only to displease them! It is, indeed, necessary to risk their displeasure in order to reclaim them. They whose chief desire is to keep the goodwill of men often fail in this duty; but whoso seeks only the interests of God and the true good of souls will yield to no such culpable weakness. With St Paul he will say: "For do I now persuade men, or God? Or do I seek to please men? If I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ" (Gal. i, 10). "But I

most gladly will spend or be spent myself for your souls: although loving you more, I be loved less" (2 Cor. xii, 15).

The true friends of God are the slaves of their brethren, ever ready to sacrifice for them their own tastes, their comforts, their desires, and to dedicate to them their time and their strength; but they will not forbear to remind them of their duty; kindly but firmly they will seek to turn them from evil and urge them towards good, and this even at the risk of giving offence.

True zeal will, however, seek to combine prudence and wisdom with firmness. Writing to one of his missionaries in Algeria who "had more need of the bridle than the spur," St Vincent de Paul endeavours to restrain him. "I beg of you," he says, "to condescend as much as possible to human infirmity; you will gain weak brethren more readily by compassion than by reproofs; it is not light but strength which they lack, and this they will acquire from the grace of your words and your good example. I do not say that their disorders should be authorized, but that in their present state the remedies applied must be gentle and benign." He also recommended him not to attempt the conversion of the Turks, which would have brought about the interdiction of his ministry to the Christian slaves, and the saint added: "Zeal is not beneficial unless it be discreet" (*Life*, by Abelly, bk. ii, ch. i, sect. 7, par. 6).

Souls closely united to God and under the continuous influence of the Holy Ghost will be aided in their zeal by the light of the gift of Counsel, which is far greater than that which is given by the virtue of prudence. No longer are they then constrained painfully to reflect and reason, and to grope for the right path; sudden inspirations will be given to them, lights which will illumine them and guide them according to their need in the way of wisdom.

But though prudent and discreet, true zeal is so courageous that it fears no misfortune. Souls which are virtuous but not yet fully detached often fail in

courage. "Unfortunately," wrote St Francis de Sales, "at the time when heresy was making its first attacks on the Christian faith in Geneva, one of my predecessors took fright and fled. If he had remained staunchly at his post, combating error and defending the faith, Geneva would be Catholic to-day" (*Life*, by Hamon, bk. i, ch. v). Without going so far as to desert their posts, those who are ungenerous often recoil in the face of difficulties. They will seek and will find excuses for themselves, as this cowardly bishop must have done; but such excuses will not avail in the eyes of the Sovereign Judge. Souls united to God and possessing the gift of Fortitude show no such weakness; neither will they recoil in face of the work of expiation, which is the duty of all who would gain the victory over sin. Those who fear and reject the light blind themselves to the fact that zeal is unproductive without penance; but all the saints, all true imitators and friends of Jesus, have felt a strong attraction for mortification, not only from motives of zeal, but from their realization of its power to subdue their own nature and expiate their own faults. The light of the Holy Spirit, given according to the measure of their generosity, has shown them that the graces which detach men from unworthy pleasures must be merited by suffering, just as those which give the victory over pride must be won by humility.

4. *True zeal is powerful and fruitful: it is a participation in the zeal of Jesus.*

Whosoever by suffering and self-denial seeks to save souls, and to free his brethren from the thraldom of sin, will have power with God; the intercession of such a one will work marvels, and the love which the Lord bears him will win great blessings for his friends. "Think you," said our Lord once to a religious, "that my affections are less tender than yours?" And he explained to her that if we, for the sake of our loved ones, show kindness to their relations, we may be sure that he, our good Master, is even more solicitous for

the souls that are dear to his friends, and will for their sakes grant them many gifts. Jesus compared a soul beloved by him to the summit of a mountain which is watered abundantly by rain from heaven, and whence rivulets flowed down its slopes to the pastures beneath, that is to say, on all other souls which were dear to her (*Lucie Christine*, by Fr. Poulain, p. 150). It was Christ's love for Martha and Mary that led him to raise Lazarus from the dead; the prayer of Stephen obtained the conversion of Paul; the tears and supplications of Monica gave Augustine to the Church. M. Olier owed the restoration of his edifying life to Marie Rousseau, a saintly lady of Paris, and his great progress in sanctity to the Venerable Mother Agnès de Langeac.

Jesus is always ready to hear the prayers of his friends interceding for their brethren, and he abundantly blesses their zeal; the saints have all great power, both to convert and to sanctify.

It is not always given to us to see the results of this zeal of the true friends of God; many of the graces obtained by them descend upon far distant souls whom they will know only in heaven; but the promise of the Lord to Abraham, "I will not destroy it for the sake of ten," still holds good; as also the word of Jesus to St Margaret Mary: "A just soul shall obtain pardon for a thousand sinners." The just soul is one who is just toward God, who gives all to God without reservation, and who in everything desires only the divine Will; such a soul gives more glory to God than a thousand sinners can take away.[1]

How fruitful, then, is this zeal with which God endows his true friends, those who devote themselves

[1] Of this number was Joseph the husband of Mary who, "being a just man and not willing publicly to expose her, was minded to put her away privately" (Matt. i, 19). Such, too, were Zachary and Elizabeth: "And they were both just before God, walking in all the commandments and justifications of the Lord without blame" (Luke i, 6.) Simeon was another of these: "And this man was just and devout, waiting for the consolation of Israel; and the Holy Ghost was in him" (Luke ii, 25). To such and to all like them is the promise made: "Blessed are they that hunger and thirst after justice, for they shall have their fill" (Matt. v, 6).

entirely to his service! Very different in character is the reasoned and methodical zeal laboriously practised by those whose piety, not being founded on humility and mortification, is still imperfect, and who are therefore not walking in the way of pure love. The zeal of such souls is as imperfect as their love, and, being tainted by human desire for success and for the approval of men, it can bring forth no spiritual fruit. The endeavours of such people to do their duty are not entirely fruitless, but there is not found in them, as in the intimate friends of Jesus, the sweet unction which pierces the soul, the light which illumines the path of duty and shows us how to walk therein, nor the infectious enthusiasm which inspires the hearts of others with burning love both for virtue and for the God of all virtues. When the perfect friends of God exhort or approve, their every word is instinct with light and encouragement. Being themselves filled with God, they show him forth to others, and those who listen to their wise advice feel divinely uplifted and strengthened.

Souls in close communion with God possess a zeal akin to that of Jesus; for he lives in his intimate friends and acts through them, that men may see in them a reflection of his life upon earth. The Saviour was on fire with zeal; he came "to cast fire on the earth" (Luke xii, 49). "And what will I but that it be kindled?" His zeal consumed him. The great sorrow of his heart was caused by the sight of the outrages committed by men against his Father, and the evils which they drew upon themselves by their sins. "My zeal hath made me pine away" (Ps. cxviii, v. 139). It was the tender zeal of Jesus which caused him to weep so touchingly over Jerusalem, and to speak affectionately to Judas at the very moment that monster was betraying him. "Jesus," said Mgr. Gay, "spared souls; supported them; showed tender consideration for their weaknesses and their prejudices. He did not demand that all should rise to the same height, but stooped to those on a lower level, making himself all to all" (bk. i).

In the training of his apostles our Lord proceeded slowly and carefully. When they were first sent to him by John the Baptist he welcomed them kindly; for a time he admitted them into his company, but without attaching them to his person; they followed him, indeed, to Cana, but returned immediately afterwards to their own work. The day came, however, when, while they were engaged in fishing, he called them to leave all and follow him. After ordaining them as his apostles, he at first restricted their mission to Palestine; but on the day of his Ascension he commanded them to go and preach the Gospel to the whole world. How generous and selfless was the zeal of Jesus, in the strength of which he undertook so many journeys, endured such great fatigue, and bore patiently with all the exactions of the crowds that thronged his footsteps. It was generous even unto death, the death of the cross.

Happy are the souls who are called to continue his work, who can say with St Paul: "I fill up those things that are wanting of the sufferings of Christ in my flesh" (Col. i, 24).

Blessed indeed are these, the faithful friends and valued coadjutors of God (*adjutores Dei*), for through them Jesus saves numberless souls from hell and wins back many others to the paths of virtue and divine love.

CHAPTER XXIV

PERFECT HUMILITY THE GIFT OF GOD

1. *Jesus the model of humility.*

God's plan for the salvation of mankind cannot be clearly comprehended unless we first consider what was the cause of man's fall and condemnation: *Initium omnis peccati superbia* ("for pride is the beginning of all sin") (Ecclus. x, 15). The Son of God was the very antithesis of the pride, rebellion, egotism, and obstinacy which characterize sin. In order to save sinners and to overthrow Satan, their proud and perfidious seducer, Jesus became lowly, obedient, and poor. How eloquently does St Paul depict the humiliations of the Word in the Incarnation! *Misit Deus Filium suum, factum ex muliere, factum sub lege* ("God sent his Son, made of a woman, made under the law") Gal. iv, 4). What self-abasement! The Son of God taking flesh from a woman—a creature so mean in comparison with himself—that he might thereby make us children of God. What humility! The Son of God submits to the Mosaic Law, a law made for a rude people. "Christ Jesus, who," as says the apostle, "being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God: but emptied himself, taking the form of a servant, being made in the likeness of men"; and who also "humbled himself, becoming obedient unto death, even to the death of the cross" (Phil. ii, 6-8). All his life long Jesus was meek and lowly; in the crib, in his childhood, in his poverty, in his work as a labourer; and, above all, in the waters of Jordan, when he mingled with sinners to receive with them the baptism of penance. It is in humility and meekness that he sets out on his work for the conquest of souls. Jesus was a conqueror, but a conqueror full of benignity; as such God had revealed him to the

prophet Isaias. "Behold my servant: I will uphold him. My elect: my soul delighteth in him. . . . He shall not cry, nor have respect to person: neither shall his voice be heard abroad. The bruised reed he shall not break, and smoking flax he shall not quench" (Isa. xlii, 1-3). St John the Baptist, in describing him to his disciples, could find no better comparison for him than that of a lamb; and in order to remind us of his gentleness and goodness, and to encourage our confidence, the Church makes her priests repeat daily the words of the Precursor: *Ecce Agnus Dei, ecce qui tollit peccatum mundi* (John i, 29). Jesus, who proclaimed "Blessed are the meek," says also of himself: *Ego mitis sum et humilis corde* ("I am meek and humble of heart"). In his Passion, as the prophet had foretold, he was dumb as a lamb before the shearer (Isa. liii, 7). He remained humble and meek even in the triumph of his Resurrection, for he allowed it to be denied when he might have proved it to the whole city of Jerusalem. But he submitted still to appearing in the eyes of many as an executed criminal, a false prophet whose deception had ended in miserable failure. He was humble and meek towards Judas who betrayed him, and towards Peter who denied him, giving no reproaches to either. But it is, above all, in the holy Eucharist that Jesus shows his ineffable humility. Everywhere and in everything he triumphs through humility and meekness. Even in heaven he does not appear as a proud conqueror clothed in majesty, and regarding his subjects from a higher plane, for in the pictures of heaven given us in the Apocalypse, Jesus is always represented as the divine Lamb. He rebukes the controversial Jews severely when they dare to insult the Father, whose honour he has so much at heart (*Ego honorifico Patrem*); but he shows no resentment at their attacks upon himself, for he seeks not his own glory: *Ego gloriam meam non quaero* (John viii, 50). Truly never did he seek it, who hid when they wished to make him king, and gave himself up only to ignominy and death.

And it is by this humility that Jesus has conquered.

On that Friday evening in the streets of Jerusalem his enemies greeted each other with rejoicing and congratulations. "The prophet who would have brought misfortune, the seducer of the people, is for ever dishonoured! He has died a felon's death between two thieves, and his terrified disciples have fled away! Of all the fame that was his, of all the enthusiasm he aroused, there now remains nothing but the memory of a mad venture, vanished dreams, and shattered illusions! We whom he condemned have defeated him; we have regained all our former ascendancy, all our threatened power and glory." But it was the proud Pharisees who were defeated, not Jesus. The Crucified was Conqueror! Through his shameful death he had consolidated his work and his reign for ever.

2. *Jesus enjoins humility on his disciples.*

The divine plan continued unchanged after our Saviour's Ascension. Jesus had aimed to develop in his disciples those virtues of humility and meekness of which his own life had furnished such beautiful examples; for only by making use of his means could they carry on his work and accomplish their destined task of converting the world. This implied for them an entirely new outlook; for, like all the Jews, the apostles had at first hoped that the reign of their Master, whom they recognized as the Messias, would be a temporal one; that Jesus would subjugate the world as the famous Assyrian, Persian, Grecian, and Roman conquerors had done, and that they themselves would be princes in the new kingdom. Salome had begged of Jesus: "Lord, say that these my two sons may sit, the one on thy right hand, the other on thy left, in thy kingdom." "You know not what you ask," replies Jesus. "Can you drink the chalice that I shall drink?" He had just been announcing to them his Passion, his Baptism of Blood, how in a few short weeks the King of the world was to be set up on his throne, the cross, and on his right hand and on his left two others were to be crucified with him. James and John asked for

crowns; Jesus offered them crosses, and then delivered this great lesson: "You know that the princes of the Gentiles lord it over them and they that are the greater exercise power upon them. It shall not be so among you: but whosoever would be the greater among you, let him be your minister. And he that would be the first among you shall be your servant" (Matt. xx, 25-27).

Those who were destined to carry on the work of Jesus must, like him, be calumniated, outraged, and persecuted. Jesus had willed to be "a worm and no man: the reproach of men and the outcast of the people" (Ps. xxi, 7). His followers were also to be, in the words of St Paul, "the refuse of this world, the offscouring of all" (1 Cor. iv, 13). Like Jesus, they were to become, not rulers, but slaves, the servants of their brethren. The Son of God, the Master of the world, reigned, not by power, but by meekness and self-sacrifice; and they, his apostles, the leaders of his people, must do likewise. It was a new conception of authority which Jesus inculcated. Henceforth the world was to behold superiors ruling by humility and devotion. Such an idea had never entered the imagination of the pagan sages of old.

Jesus desired not only the heads of his Church, but all his disciples, to be imbued with humility, for only so could he shower his graces upon them. Several incidents in the gospel show that humility wins special favours from him. Witness that of the Chanaanite woman who, persevering under harsh rebuffs, touched our Saviour's heart, and obtained, not only her daughter's cure, but also a beautiful tribute of praise from him. Jesus gave even greater praise to the centurion, who of his own accord humbled himself and protested his unworthiness. The woman with the issue of blood, on the contrary, did not humble herself; she hid in the crowd, ashamed of her affliction, so Jesus obliged her to come out and make it known to the people.

Humility is the most efficacious of all dispositions for obtaining graces from heaven. The Blessed Virgin,

herself the most striking example of humility, declares this to us; she proclaims: *Dispersit superbos mente cordis sui . . . et exaltavit humiles.*

Again, we hear Jesus with touching emotion thank his Father for having hidden these things from the wise and prudent, who in proud self-confidence despised his teaching, and for having revealed them to little ones (Luke x, 21). St Paul quotes the words of Isaias, "I will destroy the wisdom of the wise: and the prudence of the prudent I will reject"; and then exclaims triumphantly: "Where are the wise? Where is the scribe? . . . Hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? . . . and the weak things of the world hath God chosen, to confound the strong" (1 Cor. i, 19, 20, 27).

In order to save man, lost through pride, God must first humble this pride. For the working of this miracle in the soul he makes use of sufferings and humiliations, and the humblest souls will be his best instruments. It is the humility of the saints, even more than their love, which brings blessings on the Church.

3. *To those who seek it whole-heartedly God will grant true humility.*

If we would be the true friends of Jesus, we must share his sentiments: *Hoc sentite in vobis quod et in Christo Jesu* ("Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus") (Phil. ii, 5). More especially must we share his humility, for how could true friendship be possible between the meek and humble Saviour and those who are proud, vainglorious, and overbearing? Many pious souls, through neglect of this beautiful virtue, remain in the lower rank of servants of Jesus, and never rise to become his friends; and this even though they hold humility in high esteem. St Vincent de Paul says: "I have visited many religious houses, and have often asked the inmates what were the virtues to which they felt the most attraction, and even among those who most disliked humiliations one in every twenty would invariably declare for humility, so uni-

versally is this virtue loved and admired. Why, then, are there so few who embrace and practise it? It is because they are content to admire, and will not strive to acquire it" (*Life*, by Abelly, bk. iii, ch. xxii). Many, recognizing the value of humility, would like to possess it, but they cannot endure the thought of the necessary humiliations and sufferings. They cannot even bring themselves to confess their faults simply and sincerely, but must always make excuses for themselves; they do not really strive to be lowly, meek, and gracious to their neighbour, nor to practise holy indifference to slights, criticisms, and reproaches which are wounding to their self-love. Even when praying for humility they do not strive whole-heartedly to make a resolution to accept the humiliations which are so bitter to nature, and yet so necessary for the acquirement of this virtue.

Faithful Christians will be so touched by the humiliations of Jesus that they will long to share them. Generously and perseveringly they will endeavour to imitate his humility—to regard themselves as indeed the refuse of the world, *and to consent to be treated as such;* and the prayers which accompany these efforts will go straight to the heart of God. Then will come the time—swiftly for the more generous, tardily for others—when the fervent Christian soul will suddenly find that the judgements of men and their treatment of himself no longer disturb him as they once did. By the divine light given him he perceives the nothingness of honours and glory, the vanity of men's esteem—of their approval or disapproval—and the unimportance of their kindness or coldness. He experiences a detachment from earthly things, an indifference to earthly judgements, which he could never have acquired for himself. Whence comes this supernatural humility? It would appear to be due to the gift of Knowledge, for, according to St Thomas, it is through this gift that we obtain a true estimate of human beings and of affairs in general, which reveals to us the worthlessness of that glory which men value so highly (II, 2, q. ix, a. 2, *c.*). But on looking more deeply into themselves fervent

souls will recognize that they have received from the Holy Ghost other lights which have greatly helped them in forming this estimation, and which have discovered to them their own helplessness and nothingness. They were, indeed, already conscious of these faults when, on entering upon the illuminative way, they endeavoured to serve God more faithfully; but now they regard themselves as a very mass of worthlessness and weakness; for the gifts of Understanding and Wisdom have revealed to them the majesty of God and that which is due to him. Henceforth all that they may do for a Master so great and so good seems unworthy of him, and their efforts appear so puny that they find no satisfaction in them. They perceive the full horror of the faults which offend so loving a Father, and reproach themselves bitterly for the least negligence; for they know that greater fidelity on their part would already have raised them to a higher degree of virtue. God also bestows upon them that disposition which St Francis de Sales calls a love of abjection. The sense of their own worthlessness no longer depresses them; but they are happy in rendering homage to God, whom they know to be alone the source of all human virtue, and are well content to be themselves accounted nothing worth. Not until this gift of the love of humiliation has been experienced in the heart will the Christian have attained to perfect humility. Many pious souls hold themselves in low esteem, and this is the work of grace; but the discontent and sadness which are apt to overcome those who lack true humility when they are depreciated or misjudged shows that they have not this gift of the love of abjection. "Our Lord himself," says St Teresa, "will teach us to be humble far better than we could ever learn it from our own poor ideas. What comparison, indeed, can there be between them and this true humility which is communicated to the soul by lights given by God himself, in order to make it realize its own nothingness?" (*Life*, ch. xv).

This new sentiment of humility, together with joy in suffering, is one of the signs by which we may most surely know that grace is changing its mode of working

in the soul, and that the gifts of the Holy Ghost will henceforth control it far more completely. If it is faithful the virtue of humility will increase in it more and more, and will draw down upon it an abundance of divine graces. Those who know not true humility are amazed at seeing the saints—the recipients of God's favours and the authors of marvellous works of virtue—remaining so humble; but those who have received this gift, even in a small degree, understand that of all the temptations to which the true friends of God are exposed, pride and vanity are the least likely to overcome them.

4. *The fruits of perfect humility.*

The gift of humility is certainly one of the most precious favours granted by God to ardent and generous souls. From what vain cares, from what foolish sorrows does this gift deliver them! For humility brings great peace to the soul, and, together with gentleness, which always accompanies it, it is exceedingly favourable to the practice of charity. "Be of one mind, having the same charity, being of one accord, agreeing in sentiment," says St Paul to the Philippians. And he proceeds to indicate the means of preserving this concord, which Jesus had prayed might be the distinctive mark of his disciples. "Let nothing be done through contention: neither by vain glory. But in humility, let each esteem others better than themselves: each one not considering the things that are his own, but those that are other men's" (Phil. ii, 3).

The practice of charity is indeed difficult to proud and selfish souls, for such are always liable to judge their neighbour unjustly and severely, and are for ever conceiving antipathies and taking offence. The judgement of humble and gentle souls will, on the contrary, be always indulgent and kindly, and they are ever ready to efface themselves and to devote themselves to the interests of others, for charity is natural to them.

Christianity, which gave to the world the beautiful virtue of humility, was also the begetter of charity.

The humble soul, detached from self, forgetful of its own reputation, and insensible to earthly honours, will say with Jesus, "I seek not my own glory" (John viii. 50), "My glory is nothing" (*ibid.*, 54), "But I honour my Father and my God" (*ibid.*, 49). How dear are such souls to God! For they know how to abase themselves, and do not seek to grasp the glory which is due only to him. They are his faithful friends, to whom he refuses nothing. *Oratio humiliantis se nubes penetrabit* ("The prayer of him that humbleth himself shall pierce the clouds") (Ecclus. xxxv, 21). Day by day the Lord communicates his riches to them and pours out upon them greater graces than they can realize. According to the promise of Jesus, they who here below humble themselves as little children will be the greatest in the kingdom of heaven (Matt. xviii, 4), for there "he that humbleth himself shall be exalted."

CHAPTER XXV

LOVE OF THE CROSS

1. *Jesus rejoiced in suffering, and desires us to do likewise.*

Towards the end of his public life Jesus revealed to his apostles a secret of his inmost heart, which they had never divined, and which they failed to comprehend. "I have a baptism wherewith I am to be baptized. And how am I straitened until it be accomplished?" (Luke xii, 50). The Saviour had often prophesied that this baptism of blood for which he had so ardently longed, and which he had offered as a favour to the sons of Zebedee, would be the crowning of his mission. "Lay you up in your hearts these words, for it shall come to pass that the Son of Man shall be delivered into the hands of men. And they shall kill him" (Luke ix, 14; Mark ix, 30). On his way up to Jerusalem to be crucified Jesus described in detail the torments which he was to undergo: "The Son of Man shall be betrayed to the chief priests and the scribes: and they shall condemn him to death. And shall deliver him to the Gentiles to be mocked and scourged and crucified: and the third day he shall rise again" (Matt. xx, 18, 19). How often he would have spoken to his apostles of his Passion, if only they had shown sympathetic understanding! On Thabor, with a heart so overflowing with joy that transfigured his whole being, he conversed with Moses and Elias concerning the death he was to undergo (Luke ix, 31), for he knew that by this death he would conquer the world. "And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all things to myself" (John xii, 32).

In the opening scene of the great drama of his Passion, at the very moment when the traitor left the

Cenacle to seek the executioners, Jesus rejoiced because the hour of his triumph was at hand. "Now is the Son of Man glorified, and God is glorified in him" (John xiii, 31).

Jesus desired that his beloved disciples should share the sentiments of his heart. "Blessed are they that mourn," he told them. "Blessed are they that suffer persecution. . . . Blessed are ye when they shall revile you and persecute you and speak all that is evil against you, untruly, for my sake: be glad and rejoice, for your reward is very great in heaven" (Matt. v, 5-12). By this teaching he sought to inculcate in them that love of the cross which would lead them to rejoice in suffering. When entrusting them with their mission, Jesus said these glorious words to them: "Behold I send you as sheep in the midst of wolves. . . . They will deliver you up in councils and they will scourge you in their synagogues. . . . And you shall be hated by all men for my name's sake" (Matt. x, 16-22). But the hearts of the apostles were at that time so imperfect that this doctrine made no appeal to them; rather did they aspire to honours, and they quarrelled among themselves as to who should be the greatest. For this the divine Master, usually so gentle, reproached them, and twice he even spoke harshly to them. He called Peter a demon because he would not accept the fact that his Lord must suffer and be put to death. "Go behind me, Satan: thou art a scandal unto me, because thou savourest not the things that are of God, but the things that are of men" (Matt. xvi, 23). He upbraided the disciples of Emmaus because they failed to understand that Christ must suffer in order to enter into his glory. "O foolish and slow of heart to believe" (Luke xxiv, 25).

Later on, when the apostles had grown in holiness and become more enlightened, they rejoiced in being accounted worthy to suffer scourgings and reproach for the name of Jesus (Acts v, 40, 41). In their turn they, too, taught their disciples how blessed were such sufferings, which led up to heaven. St Luke summarizes the teaching of Paul and Barnabas in the words: "Con-

firming the souls of the disciples and exhorting them to continue in the faith: and that through many tribulations we must enter into the kingdom of God" (Acts xiv, 21). St Paul also, like his Master, exhorts the faithful to bear everything "in all patience and long-suffering with joy" (Col. i, 11), and St James writes: "My brethren, count it all joy when you shall fall into divers temptations" (Jas. i, 2).

2. *Why we should love suffering.*

There are two kinds of joy in suffering—that inculcated by reason, and that infused by the Holy Spirit. Suffering is so ennobling that every faithful soul should be glad to suffer. All great and beautiful things are the fruit of suffering. Even in worldly affairs success calls for painful effort and prolonged patience. Reason alone teaches this, and men with no light of faith to guide them will yet uncomplainingly endure heavy labours, great sorrows, and even death itself in a great cause. Compared with such as these, how useless are the pleasure-loving and the idle, how empty and sterile their lives! In things spiritual, suffering is even more necessary and fruitful. It alone can triumph over sin and Satan, for Satan wins his conquests through the attraction of pleasure; he is vanquished by the cross. Sin consists in the evasion of duty and the seeking of forbidden pleasure; so the remedy for sin must be sought in privations and sufferings. Divine Providence permits the existence of many evils, that from them we may draw good; for example, wars are an opportunity for heroic sacrifice; persecutions provoke fervour and create saints. St Cyprian, on seeing the outbreak of the persecution of which he was to be the most illustrious victim, said: "Long continued peace has brought about a weakening of self-discipline, therefore has celestial chastisement been sent to revive the faith grown sluggish and dormant. The priests have been lacking in fervour; faith has lost its ardour and no longer inspires to good works, and the standard of morals is debased" (*Sermo de lapsis*). Eusebius

attributed the persecution of Diocletian to the same causes, and many other struggles that the Church has since had to undergo have been seen to be trials sent by God for the remedy of similar evils.

Sufferings and privations render the soul strong and virile; comfort, success, ease, and the joys of life enervate it. History shows us that the decadence of religious Orders has invariably begun with a relaxing of the practice of poverty; mitigations of a rigorous rule were sought, ease was desired, and primitive fervour disappeared.

Suffering purifies the soul; and God, whose infinite holiness has grieved over its stains, views it with delight when thus purified, and showers on it an abundance of graces.

Suffering nourishes and preserves love. Who suffers little, loves little. "Suffering for God," said St Jane de Chantal, "is the nourishment of love on earth, just as the enjoyment of God is the food of love in heaven" (Hamon, *Life of St Francis de Sales*, bk. iv, ch. iii). "To suffer," said St Francis de Sales, "is almost the only good thing we can do in this world. . . . An ounce of patience is worth a pound of action" (*ibid.*, bk. vii, ch. xii). It is, indeed, far easier to suffer well than to work well, for there is far less self-love and self-interest in our sufferings than in our works.

Suffering opens the way to infinite and eternal joy. Worldly joys and guilty joys bring only bitter sadness; but Jesus himself declares that the sorrows endured for God "shall be turned into joy" (John xvi, 20). Even here below it is sweet to suffer and endure for God. What will it be then in heaven, where the smallest sorrows are transformed into ineffable joys? Those who murmur against suffering, instead of acknowledging its inestimable value, are indeed foolish; they resemble people who, with their pockets full of gold, do but complain that its weight overburdens them.

3. *Love of the cross is a gift of God.*

How few there are who recognize the value of suffering! And fewer still who know how to rejoice in it. Faith may reveal to us its benefits, but even faith is powerless to make us love it; the intellect may witness to its virtue, but such recognition is barren of satisfaction or of joy.

True joy in suffering is a gift from God, one which he accords only to generous souls, to those who have prepared themselves for its reception by crushing that nature which so loves pleasure and dreads pain, and who by courageous sacrifices have attained to an ardent love of God and an intimate union with him. Such souls have deserved to receive from God that purer and deeper love which brings in its train the love of the cross. As says the *Imitation:* "The spirit gains such strength from its desire of tribulation and adversity, by reason of its loving to be conformed to the cross of Christ, that it would not be without suffering and affliction; because the more it believes itself acceptable to God, the more and greater things can it bear for him" (bk. ii, ch. xii).

Meditation alone could not reveal these truths to us; it is the Holy Ghost who thus enlightens the soul and makes manifest to it the beauty and the value of suffering, in such measure that it cries: "I suffer, but it is for God—for Jesus, who has so suffered for me. Thus do I expiate my faults; thus do I console God for the pain which I have caused him. I suffer because I love, and to prove my love. By suffering my love will grow, and I shall be able to love God more perfectly through all eternity. Suffering unites me to Jesus, so that through me he may carry on his work of sorrow and salvation." "I fill up those things that are wanting of the sufferings of Christ, in my flesh, for his body, which is the Church" (Col. i, 14). "In suffering with Christ for the souls of others, I shall through him and with him obtain eternal bliss for sinners."

Souls favoured with this divine intuition may not

always be able to discern these manifold reasons for loving pain—the Holy Spirit acting rather on the will, to make them love the cross, than on the intelligence, to demonstrate the reasons for this love—but the supernatural attraction which he imparts for that which is ordinarily so repugnant to human nature will sweeten the bitterness of life, and fill it with the only true happiness—that promised by Jesus to the poor, the afflicted, and the persecuted. "Blessed are the poor. . . . Blessed are they that mourn. . . . Blessed are they that suffer persecution" (Matt. v). As says the *Imitation* again: "When thou shalt have attained to this,—that tribulation becomes sweet to thee for love of Christ, then reckon that it is well with thee, for thou hast found Paradise upon earth" (Bk. ii, ch. xii).

This paradise is not as the everlasting one, for there the Lord will wipe away all tears. "God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes" (Apoc. vii, 17; xxi, 4). Here on earth even God's dearest friends must shed tears. But they are not as the tears of self-pity shed by the selfish, which spring only from mortifications to their self-will. The friends of God have by detachment and faith risen above such sufferings as these; they weep, as did Jesus at the tomb of Lazarus, for the grief of Martha and Mary; and as he wept over Jerusalem, knowing the evils which were to come upon her. Love is the source of these sorrows, love for the souls of others, and love for God; we sorrow at our exile from the God of love and for the offences committed against him. O holy and noble sorrow which but increases love! God permits such griefs to pierce the heart of his friends here below, but in heaven he will banish them for ever.

Do we ask why a good God should allow his children thus to sorrow? God our Father is a most holy God, who, confronted by continual sin, must afflict even those he loves the most, in order to remedy by their sufferings their own sins or the sins of their brethren.

But God is a most tender Father, who desires, above all things, to see his children happy. He ever mingles consolations with the trials which he reluctantly sends

them, and gives tokens of his love with the workings of his justice. St Paul names him "the God of all comfort" (2 Cor. i, 3), and the consolations which he gives are very different from the superficial and ephemeral ones offered by human beings. Divine consolations penetrate to the very depths of the soul, and their comfort remains. The souls which God loves most are at the same time the most sorely tried and the most sweetly consoled. In this they resemble Christ, whose soul, above all others, knew the most crushing sorrows and the most inebriating delights. As says St Paul: "For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so also by Christ doth our comfort abound" (2 Cor. i, 5). The Psalmist's words tell of the experience of one who has known this divine tenderness: "According to the multitude of my sorrows in my heart, thy comforts have given joy to my soul" (Ps. xciii, 19).

How gracious is the Lord to those who love him! how divinely he rewards generous souls!

By his gift of love of the cross, in place of grief and desolation he secures to them perpetual peace and profoundest joy. Devoted souls would not wish to be rid of suffering, for they know that suffering increases their love for the Lord, and they praise him for so honouring them. Tribulations are to them but the source of sweet consolations here below and a promise of endless felicity, of ineffable and eternal delights hereafter.

CHAPTER XXVI

BLENDING OF THE HUMAN WILL WITH THE DIVINE

1. *The two opposing tendencies of the human will.*

"In heaven," says St John, the beloved apostle, "we shall be like to God . . . and every one that hath this hope in him sanctifieth himself, as he also is holy" (1 John iii, 2, 3). "Be ye holy, because I the Lord your God am holy," (Lev. xix, 2; xi, 44) is the Lord's repeated command to his people. This likeness to God, which will be both the joy and the glory of our eternal life, must be, above all, a likeness of holiness; it can only be effected by the blending of the human will with the divine, by the annihilation of every human desire which is not holy, and by loving acceptance of the will of God, which is essentially holy. When we have submitted our own will in all things to the will of God, he will himself perfect this likeness in us. He will inundate us with his graces here on earth, and in heaven he will grant us a still more abundant share in his infinite beauty and bliss.

It should, then, be our constant effort to banish from the will every desire which is not holy. We must, as St Paul teaches, "put off the old man, who is corrupted according to the desire of error. And put on the new man, who according to God is created in justice and holiness of truth" (Eph. iv, 22, 24). We must renounce our own desires and inordinate affections, and "put on the Lord Jesus Christ" (Rom. xiii, 14). The great apostle was deeply impressed by the conflict between the different tendencies of the human soul, which creates, as it were, two implacable adversaries within us, two wrestlers perpetually at grips—the old man, who is the creature of the sinner Adam, and the new

and divine Man, the creation of Jesus Christ. The fall of our first parents gave activity to all the evil instincts from which divine goodness had hitherto preserved humanity, and man became a prey to selfishness, sensuality, pride, and avarice. But Jesus came to restore the grace which Adam had lost, and to show man how he might again tread the path of virtue. Adam, alas! still lives in us, but so also does Jesus. Our task must be to drive out from the stronghold of our souls the old Adam with his inherited evil tendencies, his faults and passions, and to foster therein the seeds of the growth of perfection sown by Jesus.

To this end all the desires of our corrupt nature which are contrary to the divine Will must be overcome, and those which emanate from Nature, even if legitimate, must either be made conformable to the divine Will or they must be uprooted.

On the threshold of his Passion, Jesus exclaimed: "Father, save me from this hour. But for this cause I came unto this hour. Father, glorify thy name" (John xii, 27, 28). And a few hours later, in the garden of Gethsemani, he said again: "Father, if it be possible, let this chalice pass from me. Nevertheless, not as I will, but as thou wilt" (Matt. xxvi, 39).

There was no struggle in the soul of our Saviour between a higher and a lower nature; he only experienced that horror of suffering which is common to every human soul because he willed to feel it. Though almost overwhelmed by pain, he still desired to suffer; he indeed possessed two wills, but in him the human was completely subordinate to the divine. With us it is very different. Our human nature will only yield to grace, and submit itself to the divine good pleasure by means of severe and vigilant discipline. The natural desires of man are for comfort, enjoyment, esteem, admiration, and love; he wishes to be exempt from all privation, suffering, and humiliation, and to be free to act according to the dictates of his own will. But the divine Will, infused in his soul by grace, inspires and exalts the natural man, so that he learns to love God and to seek his glory in every possible way, especially

by the sure way of sacrifice and suffering. How ardent are the desires of our natural will; how persevering and ingenious it is in attaining its objects! "You cannot imagine," said Tauler, "how adroit and deceitful is our nature in seeking its own comfort. To obtain the pleasures and luxuries it desires it will even seek to persuade us that they are necessaries; it is therefore of sovereign importance that the rational man keep a constant guard over himself, and bridle his passions, in order that he may control the beast that is in him" (Edition Noel, t. v, p. 399, First Sermon for the Dedication). And again: "It is not enough to direct our intentions aright; Nature is so greedy, so rebellious and obstinate, that she cannot be governed simply by a command. The shortest way to complete union with God is complete mortification" (vol. ii, p. 272, First Sermon for Easter).

Natural and supernatural desires exist side by side in our souls, like good and bad herbs in a garden. If the gardener allow the bad to spread they will choke and kill the good ones; in like manner, if we give free rein to the natural man, he will become ever stronger and end by crowding out the spiritual; but if we subdue and mortify our human nature, the spiritual will develop in us until it becomes at length all-powerful and irresistible. St Francis de Sales was so convinced of this truth that he would fain have impressed it on every mind. His biographers recount that his favourite saying, and one which he never tired of repeating, was the following: "To him who most mortifies his natural inclinations will be accorded the greatest spiritual inspirations" (*Spirit of St Francis de Sales*, part x, sec. 1).

We must, then, wage war on all the natural inclinations; we must bridle the mind by recollection, overcome self-love by the practice of humility, and subdue the body, the heart, the tastes, and the will by courageous mortification.

2. *The necessity for the mortification of the flesh.*

This mortification is the first and great essential. Let us hear what Mgr. Gay says concerning it: "From the time of Adam, who by God's command performed severe penance for his sin for the rest of his life, up to the time of St Paul, who was inspired by the Holy Ghost to 'chastise his body and bring it into subjection,' bodily mortification has always been considered a divine obligation. The Church has invariably taught its necessity, and has imposed the practice of it upon all" (*Christian Life and Virtues*, vii, t. xxii, 22).

Mgr. Gay proceeds to cite the example of St Paul; for this great apostle often reverts in his epistles to the necessity for the mortification of the flesh. "For they that are according to the flesh mind the things that are of the flesh: but they that are according to the spirit mind the things that are of the spirit. For the wisdom of the flesh is death: but the wisdom of the spirit is life and peace. Because the wisdom of the flesh is an enemy to God. For it is not subject to the law of God: neither can it be" (Rom. viii, 5-7). They that are according to the flesh do indeed mind the things of the flesh and are absorbed in them; all their desire is for sensual satisfactions; they rejoice when they obtain these, and are sad and sorry when deprived of them; such things even form their main topics of conversation. Natural inclinations have in these people prevailed over the holy inspirations of grace and their wills are far from being conformed to the will of God. Consider, on the other hand, those who have cast off the yoke of the flesh, and who mind the things of the spirit (*Quae sunt Spiritus sapiunt*). Their thoughts are ever busy with things divine; they aspire only to the possession of virtue and divine love; in the words of the apostle, "they walk according to the spirit," and their will is one with the will of God. St Paul exhorts us that "we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh." We owe to our body what is necessary and

indispensable for the fulfilling of its functions, and no more. "For if you live according to the flesh, you shall die: but if by the Spirit you mortify the deeds of the flesh, you shall live" (Rom. viii, 13). The conclusion which would seem to have forced itself upon the holy apostle is this: Vanquish your flesh, or it will vanquish you; master it, fight it, subdue it, humiliate and crush it by denying its demands and its gratifications, and you will gain true and divine life.

It is the will of God that the spirit gain complete mastery over the body. We must put on the new man; we must share in the sentiments of Jesus. But Jesus assumed human nature, not that he might gratify it, but in order to offer it up, a living sacrifice, for the glory of his Father and the salvation of souls. It is God's will that our body be not our master, but our docile slave; we must learn of Jesus to present it "a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing unto God." Our bodies, then, must be victims; but in divers ways. God does not ask of all the heroic austerities of the great saints, but he does ask for stainless purity and absolute temperance. He wills that we practise in utmost perfection the virtues that will keep the body in complete subjection to the soul, and this we can only achieve by subduing the rebellious flesh, maltreating and mortifying it. We have seen that this was the teaching of St Paul; that he "chastised his body and brought it into subjection, lest he should become a castaway"; and the saints one and all give the same testimony. St Vincent de Paul says: "He who makes little of exterior mortifications, declaring that the interior are of more benefit, shows that he is mortified neither interiorly nor exteriorly" (*Life*, by Abelly, bk. iii, ch. xxiv). Those who evade bodily suffering are not masters of their flesh, for they thereby, though unconsciously, obey the will of the flesh rather than the will of God. The exactions of the flesh and its inordinate passions render mortification an absolute necessity, and he who would subdue his natural will, and bring it into harmony with the will of God, must, like our Saviour, offer his body

Many are called by our Lord to the ranks of his intimate friends who never, alas! attain to this honour, because they are unwilling to accept the sufferings of soul and body which must be the lot of all true friends of Jesus.

3. *The sacrifices demanded of the heart.*

It is the will of God that our heart be wholly his and love him perfectly. To this end it must be disciplined and purified, even in its most legitimate affections, so that they may all become wholly supernatural. To love is so sweet a thing. It is the great need of every sensitive nature, for God, who is love (*Deus caritas est*), has fashioned the noblest of his creatures in his own image. Love will be the great joy of heaven; it is even now the true happiness of earth. What is sweeter than the love of father, mother, brothers, sisters, and friends, of our benefactors, or of our native land? Only hearts depraved by selfishness and corrupted by vice can fail to treasure these dear affections; yet we must take heed never to allow them to usurp the place of divine love; for our Lord says: "He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me" (Matt. x, 37).

Love is the principle of all our actions; each and every one springs either from love of God, from love of others, or from self-love. If, then, we would dedicate our life to God, our heart must be wholly governed and inspired by divine love; we must love God with our whole heart. To this end all that is most intimate, ardent, and delicate in the sentiments of the human soul must be turned Godwards, and its capacity for loving must be appropriated, transformed, and spiritualized by grace. This can only be effected when the supernatural has assumed entire sway over the heart and has purified it. Lively affections—even legitimate ones—might easily become the source of imperfect actions by inspiring a quest for personal satisfaction which could not but displease the God of all holiness

and impede the operation of his grace. If, for instance, we love some dear one to excess, we might indulge in the pleasure of conversation with him to the detriment of our duty; and in this and other ways even sentiments of legitimate affection may lead human nature astray, and if allowed to take root will prove hard to eradicate.

He, then, who would attain to fervour must strictly discipline his heart, and be ready to make any sacrifice which may be asked of him by the God who loves him and desires his sanctification.

The heartaches caused by separations, by the sorrows and misfortunes of those we love, or by their resistance to good advice, by their weaknesses and their faults, will all help to destroy what is too human in our affection for them, and will transform our natural love into a pure and wholly supernatural one. Thus stripped bare by sacrifice, and bereft by these trials of the natural joys of human affection, the faithful soul becomes gradually detached; it no longer loves for the sake of its own enjoyment, but only in God and for God, and its love is the stronger for being thus disinterested. Abraham did not love Isaac less after consenting to sacrifice him; his love became holier, purer, and stronger than before.

4. *The struggle against the attachments, the tastes, and the tendencies of the will.*

The faithful Christian who desires to make his will one with the will of God must sacrifice his own tastes and ideas. By such acts of renunciation he will overcome the obstacles which in almost every creature frustrate the full accomplishment of the divine Will.

"Every time we renounce our own will to do that of others," said the saintly curé of Ars, "we acquire great merit. To die to one's own will is that which makes saints."

M. Olier used to consult M. de Breton Villiers even on important matters; and when the latter, who was quite young, evaded giving his advice, M. Olier said to him: "If I were alone with John"—John was his

servant—" I would ask counsel of him, and I would do what he said. We should if possible never act according to our own will even in the least things " (*Life*, by Faillon, part ii, bk. vi).

Prompt obedience to the rule, or, if one is not a religious, to one's rule of life, is one of the surest ways of vanquishing self-will and accomplishing the will of God; it will also expiate many faults and gain great merit for us.

On July 6, 1874, Sister Mary of Jesus Crucified saw in a vision the soul of the Mother Prioress of the Carmel of Marseilles pass through the flames of Purgatory and go straight to heaven. Astonished, she asked her what had won for her this great favour. " It was because I never failed in charity, and always strictly observed the rule," answered the deceased (*Life*, by Père Estrate, ch. xv). On the other hand, St Margaret Mary, according to the testimony of Mother Greyfié, was vouchsafed a vision of one of the deceased Sisters of her community who was suffering torments in Purgatory because of her want of charity, and her readiness to seek dispensations from the rule and from the community labours for the sake of her own bodily relief and comfort (*Life and Works*, p. 376).

This renunciation of the will, which unites the soul so closely to God, must also be accompanied by that of the judgement. As a rule, alas! the poorer a man's judgement, the more does he cling to it; the more short-sighted he is, the more positive and self-confident he is apt to be. The truly wise man will take time for reflection over every question, and will weigh the arguments for and against. When differences of opinion arise, we must recognize that it is as possible for our brethren to be right as ourselves. Alas! how difficult do most of us find it to confess ourselves in the wrong, or to give up our own views and sacrifice our own desires to those of our neighbour.

Many of us also are greatly attached to our own possessions, to our pleasant occupations, in fact, to all which gratifies human nature. These are influences which have been at work in us from childhood, and if

not curbed they will become more and more tyrannical. It will need a determined struggle to subjugate both our love of comfort and our tastes, and to bring both into line with the divine Will. "We ought to hold all our possessions entirely subject to the will of God," says Tauler, "this is true poverty of spirit. All that is dearest to us, our friends, reputation, body, soul, pleasures, and comforts, we must be ready to abandon whole-heartedly and unreservedly for the love of God if and when he should require it of us; this is the true detachment of spirit which keeps the mind of man fixed on God. Even the possession of a kingdom will not render such a man as this less poor in spirit before God" (Edition of P. Noel, vol. ii, Sermon of the Second Sunday after Epiphany).

What acts of renunciation must be made, what opposition endured, what crosses must be borne, in the subduing of all our natural inclinations and attachments, that we may hold ourselves ready in all things to do God's good pleasure!

Even in the most ordinary circumstances of life, generous and enlightened souls will find many occasions for self-sacrifice; they will learn cheerfully to renounce self in the service of others, to be zealous and humble, and to endeavour perfectly to fulfil the duties of the life and state to which they have been called. They should, moreover, make it their aim to repress those feelings of joy, of sadness, or of fear, which are the outcome of natural desires and affections, and which serve to nourish and excite them. This state of holy indifference and entire abandonment must be the aim of all who would become perfect, but it can only be attained by the help of the sustaining strength of the Lord, which must be sought in ardent and instant prayer.

5. *How God rewards those who courageously deny themselves in all things.*

Wise indeed are those loving hearts who, uniting ardent prayer with courageous effort, follow the path of renunciation that Jesus has traced, and tread in his footsteps. *Qui vult venire post me, abneget semetipsum* ("If any man would come after me, let him deny himself"). God will overwhelm these faithful ones with his graces. In the words of Tauler: "If a man die to himself a thousand times a day, each of these deaths will be followed by a more fruitful life. God cannot refuse such a life to such a death. Yea, the more complete, the harder, and more painful the death, the sweeter, stronger, and truer will be the life emerging therefrom. Each increase of this life gives a man new strength and fresh courage for the facing of a death still more complete" (vol. ii, p. 277, First Sermon for Easter). God can never be outdone in generosity, and whenever he sees souls struggling valiantly and perseveringly against Nature he will come to the help of their weakness, and will enlighten their understanding that they may comprehend the infinite wisdom, holiness, and goodness of his divine Will, and may recognize in him the sum and essence of all perfection, of which this Will is a part. God will then take possession of this human will whose sole desire is to yield itself to him. He will strengthen its weakness and inspire and direct it according to his good pleasure, making it one with his own.

Souls thus divinely fortified and united with the Lord have a very pure, calm, constant, and intense love for the divine Will; and for its accomplishment they dare, do, and accept all, no matter how great the sufferings involved to their human nature.

This does not imply that God absolves them from all struggle and spares them all bitterness. "Our Lord declared to me," relates St Margaret Mary, "that he would abate none of my pains nor repugnances, for that these did honour to his own sufferings in the garden of

Olives, and they also afforded me opportunities for humiliations and for victories" (*Life*, ed. Mgr. Gauthey, vol. ii, p. 82).

Souls which are united with the divine Will never falter in the struggle, but triumph over all repugnance; acts of renunciation that were formerly difficult to them at length become easy, and even those that still cost them dear they will accomplish with a glad heart.

Mortification is always contrary to Nature, but, because it is pleasing to God, loving souls will practise it generously. Indeed, they are impelled thereto by their desire to resemble Jesus, and by their love for him; for love cannot permit that Jesus suffer all and we nothing. In the inner sanctuary of the heart a voice whispers to us the same words that were whispered to Gemma Galgani by her Guardian Angel: "Do you desire to love Jesus? Then suffer for him" (*Life*, ch. viii, p. 85).

Those who seek only the divine Will are ever content with their lot. With St Paul they can say: "I know both how to be brought low, and I know how to abound" (Phil. iv, 12). If they have abundance they will use it in moderation, and will curb their natural desires by self-imposed privations. If they have little, they will see in this the dispensation of God, and be therewith content.

"Thy will be done!" This is the habitual disposition of the faithful soul; and God himself, as is revealed to us by the Holy Ghost, does the will of them that fear him. *Voluntatem timentium se faciet* (Ps. cxliv, 19). He delights to gratify the affections and desires of these his servants, for they are all animated by holiness. The will of the faithful soul is so perfectly blended with that of God that it becomes one with him. It is as if Jesus and the soul together quickened the same body and inspired its actions. "They shall be two in one flesh" (*Erunt duo in carne una*) (Eph. v, 31). It is the mystical marriage, the perfect union, prelude, and presage of the celestial union, in which God will abide eternally in his elect, and his elect in him.

EPILOGUE

THE doctrines set forth in this work are drawn from sacred Scripture and from the writings of the holy doctors; they are also the fruits of long experience. During the last thirty-seven years, since April, 1883, when it pleased God to give us care of souls and to will that we consecrate to them the greater part of our time, he has placed many generous souls under our direction, and has permitted us to have close relations with them. We have thus had a greater opportunity than most of our brethren in the priesthood of proving that the promises made by our Lord to faithful souls are always fulfilled, and that the praises of the unitive and perfect way sung by the saints are in entire agreement with the truth.

Si scires donum Dei! ("If thou didst know the gift of God!") O pious soul, if you but knew the goodness of God, the prodigality of his graces to those who serve him, you would be encouraged and excited to seek him with your whole heart. Alas! we meet with many souls whom God has called to perfect love, whom he has favoured with choice graces, and enlightened as to the value of virtue and the blessings of a life wholly given to him; whose most ardent desire should therefore be admittance to the ranks of the true friends of Jesus, but who are held back by fear of the necessary renunciation, and prefer to regard union with God as a chimera. Some, with a certain contemptuous pity, apply the name of mystic to those who aim at leading a life of holy recollection, and who would die to themselves in order to make progress in the interior life. They, on the contrary, prefer to give their time to exterior works, with a few devotional exercises thrown in, which latter they perform too often indifferently and with continual distraction.

These poor creatures are, however, greatly mistaken, for this is far from being what God requires of us.

Others there are whose aspirations are more noble; they greatly desire to advance in the interior life, but they are not sufficiently courageous and faithful in the struggle, and so fall short of what they might be; they also lack self-confidence, and think that perfection is beyond their reach. St Teresa again and again calls attention to this tendency and rebukes it. "The diffidence of such as these is," she says, "due to the fact that the picture drawn for them of the beauty of generous souls fills them rather with alarm than encouragement. The books which treat of prayer and contemplation tell us that we should be indifferent to what is said of us, and indeed should prefer that evil be spoken of us rather than good. That we should take no account of honours and be detached from all human relationships. But," remarks the saint, "these virtues are pure gifts from God, supernatural endowments" (*Life*, ch. xxxi).

They are indeed pure gifts from God, but, as St Teresa adds, God will accord them to those who trust in him and dispose themselves for their reception. The generosity of God is not tardy towards those who, aspiring to a life of love, multiply their sacrifices, make generous efforts, and do holy violence to themselves. He does not wait for eternity to shower his favours upon them, for he has promised the reward of a hundredfold even in this life to generous and loving hearts. It is of these graces, accorded by God to his true friends on earth, that St Paul writes: "Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither hath it entered into the heart of man, what things God hath prepared for them that love him" (1 Cor. ii, 9). These words, usually understood as referring to heavenly joys, are indeed true of them also, but St Paul in this instance uses them to describe the graces bestowed on the friends of God here below. They are not always sensible consolations which God thus accords; he can give more and better than these. In order more perfectly to serve him, the true friends of God desire,

above all things, to acquire great virtues, and he gives them these virtues freely, and in far greater perfection than by their own efforts they could ever have attained. Fidelity to grace he rewards with the gift of more abundant and more precious graces; love, with the power of loving more passionately, purely, and nobly.

The true nature of these gifts of the divine Master is very little understood; even the recipients thereof are hardly conscious of what they owe to them in the way of progress; for the love which they thus receive is not a sensible one, though none the less their spiritual growth is greatly strengthened thereby. When the day at last dawns on which the soul, fully enlightened, and freed from the darkness of the body, sees herself as she truly is, she will then perceive all the greatness of the mercies of God, and how abundantly the gift of his graces has rewarded her efforts.

Take courage, then, O fervent soul, and let your aim be high! Be not content with ordinary virtue, with conventional piety, but "Be you therefore perfect, as also your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matt. v, 48). "In carefulness not slothful, in spirit fervent. Serving the Lord. . . . Until Christ be formed in you" (Rom. xii; Gal. iv). Never believe perfection to be beyond your reach; your own unaided strength may be powerless to gain its summit, but God can lift you there as easily as one would lift a child in one's arms. Struggle courageously, have a steadfast hope, pray without ceasing, and God will bless your efforts. He will admit you to the ranks of his intimate friends. His love will sanctify you, and your holiness will win yet greater love from him. You will go from strength to strength until the day when your love, being perfect, will receive its long-desired reward; God will give himself to you according to the words of the divine Master—"in good measure and pressed down and shaken together and running over" (*mensuram bonam et confertam et coagitatam et superfluentem dabunt in sinum vestrum*) (Luke viii, 38).

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